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TO(O) QUEER THE CHICAN@S: DISRUPTING GENDERS IN THE POST-BORDERLANDS

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TO(O) QUEER THE CHICAN@S: DISRUPTING GENDERS IN THE POST-BORDERLANDS

by

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Dedication

en memoria de

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“To(o) Queer the Chican@s: Disrupting Genders in the Post-Borderlands" examines representations of non-normative genders and sexualities in Mexican American literature. Tracking the non-normative queer subject, I argue that genderqueerness inflects how racialized and ethnic subjectivities get constituted. By approaching gender and sexuality as multivalent categories of analysis, I counter the received notion that Chicana lesbian and queer literature began and peaked in the late twentieth century and situate genderqueerness as a formidable yet unacknowledged presence in the formation of the Chicana/o cultural imaginary and the Chicana/o and Latina/o literary canon.

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Introduction: Altares for Anzaldúa

Away, she went away.
But every place she went
they pushed her to the other side
and that other side pushed her to the other side
of the other side of the other side
Kept in the shadows of other.
No right to sing, to rage, to explode.
You should be ashamed of yourself.
People are starving in Ethiopia,
dying in Guatemala and Nicaragua
while you talk about gay rights and orgasms.

—Gloria Anzaldúa, excerpt from the poem "Del otro lado,"
in *Latina Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About,*
edited by Carla Trujillo

The Chicano scribe remembers, not out of nostalgia but out of hope. She remembers in order to envision.

—Cherríe Moraga, *The Last Generation*

It started with an ending. In May of 2004, I left my teaching job, and I was waiting to begin graduate school that fall. I received the news as it spread across the Internet: Gloria Anzaldúa had died. The author of *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, editor of *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras*, and Cherríe Moraga's co-editor of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, had left an indelible mark on so many lives and minds. Concentric waves of mourning radiated out from her family, intimates, close friends, long-time colleagues, editors, comadres, readers, and fans. The grief from those who had never even met her seemed palpable as well. Countless memorial websites were launched where Internet users could post their condolences. For many, the loss of Gloria Anzaldúa marked the end of an era.

What struck me especially hard about her death was that Anzaldúa had been in the final stages of writing her dissertation. She died ABD, All But Dissertation. As an undergraduate, I had been deeply inspired by Anzaldúa's writing, and now upon her death, I vowed that I would do everything in my power to get my doctorate. When I started school, groups of community activists and university constituents began working together to plan a tribute event to memorialize Anzaldúa, and I joined that effort via my involvement with ALLGO: A Queer People of Color Organization (formerly called Austin Latina/o Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Organization) as well as through my new affiliation as a graduate student with the Center for Mexican American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. Working with others to help organize the

Austin tribute in Anzaldúa's honor helped me work through my own mourning (see Figure 1). It also created spaces for new alliances. It was at tribute committee meetings where I met the scholar who would become my dissertation co-chair and mentor in Mexican American studies, Domino Renee Perez. It was at a tribute event at Las Manitas restaurant (which has since been demolished by developers) where I met the scholar who would become my other co-chair and my mentor in queer studies, Ann Cvetkovich.

Figure 1: Poster announcing the Austin tribute in memory of Gloria Anzaldúa. The inset photos include images of altars built in her honor.

At the Austin tribute, Cherríe Moraga spoke as someone who had worked alongside Anzaldúa as a fellow activist and writer. Addressing the crowd of several hundred people, Moraga talked about how Anzaldúa had inspired a generation of Chicana lesbianas to speak out against multiple oppressions. Moraga went on to say that Anzaldúa's writing would continue to move people to action but that other writers from the new generation of Chicana lesbianas needed to take up Anzaldúa's charge to build alliances across race, gender, sexuality, and class.

Moraga asked, "Who's next? Who will continue the work so that Gloria and I will not be the last generation?" She paused to await a response, letting her question linger in the air. An activist friend of Anzaldúa's from Austin stood up across the room. Another young Latina, perhaps sixteen years old, stood up. I stood up. Several others followed suit. Moraga invited us up to the microphone to speak. In turn, we each went to the mic and talked about the impact Anzaldúa had had on us. I spoke about how reading *Making Face/Making Soul* had saved my life, and I was not exaggerating. I had come across the anthology in my college library during the most difficult time of my life, and Anzaldúa's words shifted my sense of who I could become in the world, how I could imagine a way to live as Chicana *and* queer. Anzaldúa's words came for me, and I listened. And at the Anzaldúa tribute, Moraga's words called to me, and I answered.

As a result of that day, I began to research who the next generation of Chicana lesbiana writers were and what they cared about. In this search, I encountered new works such as the fiction of Felicia Luna Lemus, which I was introduced to in a graduate

seminar taught by Dr. Perez. Lemus challenged the expectations I had of Chicana lesbian authors to represent Chicanidad and lesbian sexuality as knowable. Her queerly gendered characters demanded an openness in reading their queer fluidity along complex continuums of race, gender, and sexuality. In Lemus's work, I wondered whether I had found a member of that "next generation" summoned by Moraga. And so it began.

At that public moment of mourning la Gloria, Moraga's question of "Who's next?" had stirred in me not just an emotional and political response but also the deep desire to understand whether Moraga's fears of being among the last generation of Chicana lesbiana activist-writers were warranted. Were Anzaldúa and Moraga part of the last generation to want what Moraga has referred to as a "queer Aztlán"? Was the borderlands struggle identified by Anzaldúa over? Did contemporary Chicana lesbianas and queers no longer feel the schizophrenic, bilateral pull of living between two cultures and never feeling enough for either? Had jotería arrived in a tranquil, utopian Chicano-landia? Alternately, if la lucha continued, if there is or is to be a *next* generation, then who are they, where are they, and what do they want?

Before exploring those questions, it is important to take a look at what the borderlands struggle of Anzaldúa and the Queer Aztlán of Moraga mean. When Moraga asked, "Who's next? Who will continue the work so that Gloria and I will not be the last generation?" her loaded question invoked the title of her prose and poetry collection *The Last Generation*, published by the feminist collective South End Press in 1993. The first edition's book cover features the artwork *Mis Madres* (Figure 2), by Estér Hernández,

known for her fiercely feminist Chicana art in the 1970s and 1980s, such as *Sun Mad* and *La Ofrenda*.

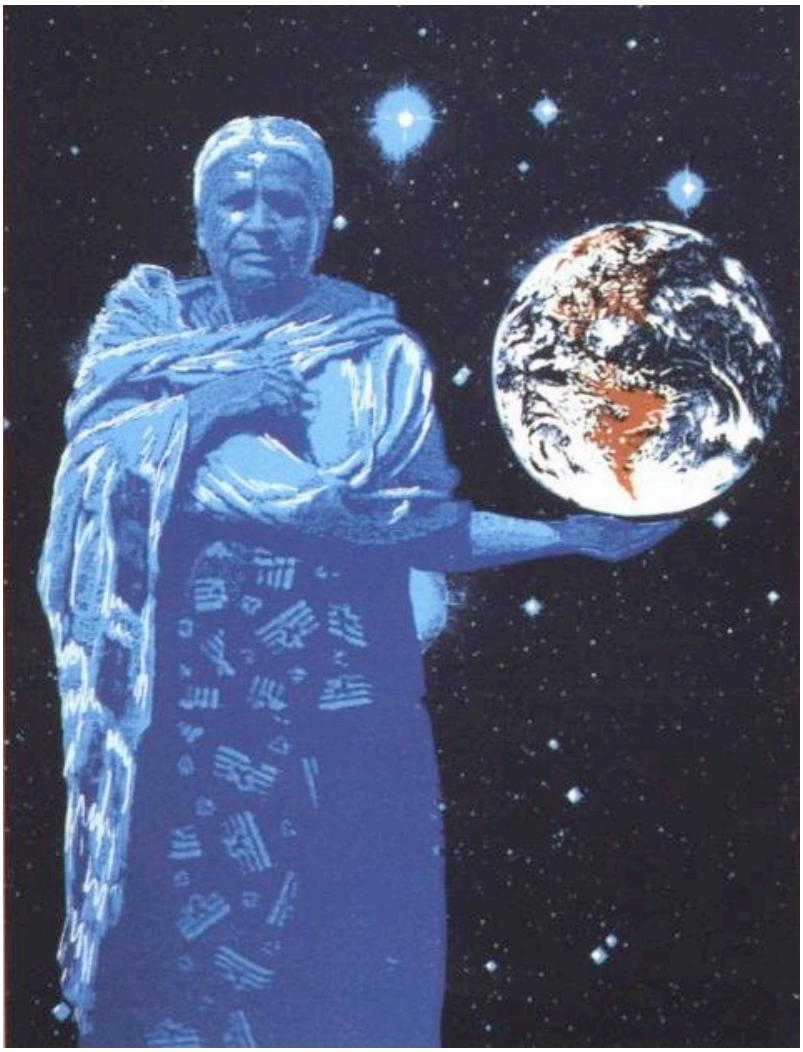

Figure 2: ***Mis Madres*** **(silkscreen print, 30x22 in., 1986), by Estér Hernández, is featured on the cover of the first edition of** ***The Last Generation: Prose and Poetry*** **(1993), by Cherríe Moraga.**

Mis Madres (My Mothers) depicts two maternal figures: an elder Indigenous mestiza woman and mother earth. The woman is holding the planet in the palm of her hand, the dark starry cosmos filling the background behind them. The Indigenous woman has a somber look, directly engaging the viewer as a subject. She holds her right hand to her heart. With her left hand, she holds up the earth, supporting the planet. Unlike the image of Atlas holding up the world on his muscular shoulders, this image of the Indigenous woman highlights a strength that is rarely acknowledged in terms of age, gender, and ethnicity. Perhaps she is protecting the earth, keeping it safe; or perhaps she is offering the earth as a gift to the onlooker. Her hand touching and holding the planet draws a direct connection between humans and the earth and its land and nature, suggesting that Indigenous women may hold the key to the future of the planet. The juxtaposition of the elderly woman, a sign of the historic past, holding the earth amid the futuristic-looking, vast space mirrors how Moraga pits loss against hope in *The Last Generation*, working against her fears that she is the last of a dying breed of mestiz@s or Chican@s.

The Last Generation includes an essay called "Queer Aztlán: The Re-formation of the Chicano Tribe," in which Moraga lays out a vision for a future homeland for Chican@ queers. Significantly, Moraga first presented a version of the "Queer Aztlán" essay at the first national conference of LLEGO, the Latino/a Lesbian and Gay Organization, held in Houston in 1992. LLEGO, which unfortunately disbanded due to funding issues a few years ago, formed as an offshoot of ALLGO, the Austin Latino/a Lesbian and Gay Organization (which expanded its name to include bisexuals and

transgenders and is now a statewide Texas organization called ALLGO: A Queer People of Color Organization). The place and impetus for Moraga's proposing a "Queer Aztlán," then, occurred within the context of the first nationally organized gathering of queer Chican@s and Latin@s.

Moraga's conception of a "Queer Aztlán" offers an alternative vision to the fear of cultural destruction expressed throughout much of *The Last Generation*. It also serves as a mixed retort to the radical Queer Nation, a New York-based group formed in 1990 to mobilize controversial direct actions against homophobia; the group was criticized by mainstream media for their daring tactics, such as outing public figures. Groups such as Queer Nation were also criticized by queer people of color for not including them. Arguing from the get-go for another way of making change, Moraga opens *The Last Generation* with an epigraph quoting Mexican novelist Rosario Castellanos: "Debe haber otro modo… / Otro modo de ser humano y libre / Otro modo de ser." [1]

Moraga dedicates her collection of prose and poetry "To honor the legacies of Audre Lorde and César Chávez" and "*For the yet unborn*" (author's emphasis, n.p.). Thus, Moraga cites multiple legacies of social movements. She calls upon the legacies of the renowned Black Caribbean American writer Audre Lorde, who self-identified as "black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet" and died in 1992, and the Chicano Movement

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[1] (There must be another way…/Another way to be human and free / Another way to be, n.p.).

labor organizer César Chávez, who died in 1993. Moraga simultaneously suggests that she does indeed imagine and hope for a next generation to come in "the yet unborn."

Despite this initial glimmer of hope, Moraga makes it clear that her work emanates from her fear of the finality of imperial conquest. She writes, "In 1524, just three years after the Spanish Conquest of the Aztec Empire, the Náhuatl sages, the tlamatinime, came before the missionary friars in defense of their religion. 'Our gods are already dead,' they stated. 'Let us perish now.' Their codices lay smoldering in heaps of ash" (2). Moraga then identifies herself as operating within this legacy of the conquered Aztecs:

> I write with the same knowledge, the same sadness, recognizing the full impact of the colonial 'experiment' on the lives of Chicanos, mestizos, and Native Americans. Our codices—dead leaves unwritten—lie smoldering in the ashes of disregard, censure, and erasure. *The Last Generation* emerges from those ashes. I write it against time, out of a sense of urgency that Chicanos are a disappearing tribe, out of a sense of this disappearance in my own familia. (2)

Moraga's fear of Chican@s disappearing from within her own family is partly borne of her own mixed race identity of Chicana and Anglo. The fear of losing Chicanidad or Chican@-ness within her own family extends outward to a globalized fear of total assimilation and erasure of Chican@s by absorption into the dominant Anglo culture. This fear of destruction or conquest is compounded by rejection by potential community allies, as Moraga details her own personal rejection as a Chicana lesbian by traditional

Chican@s as well as by white lesbian feminists. Furthermore, she connects the struggles of Chicana lesbians to those of gay Chicanos, particularly around the impacts of HIV and AIDS: "The AIDS epidemic has seriously shaken the foundation of the Chicano gay community" (162). As a result, argues Moraga, "[Chicano] gay men seem more willing than ever to explore those areas of political change that will ensure their survival." According to Moraga, "In their fight against AIDS, they have been rejected and neglected by both the white gay male establishment and the Latino heterosexual health-care community. They have also witnessed direct support by Latina lesbians" (163).

Moraga claims that the ultimate struggle for lesbian and gay Chican@s and for Chican@s in general is aligned with the struggles of native peoples across the globe, citing the fight for self-sovereignty as a shared struggle. Yet, in Moraga's estimation, the dilemma of Chican@s is exacerbated by the fact that many Chican@s have turned away from or ignored the knowledge of their Indigenous elders. Moraga ends her manifesto of *The Last Generation* by urging a "new Chicano nationalism" and by naming queer Chicanas as inheritors of "La Causa Chicana," as a form of hope for Chican@s to survive into the next millennium.

Like Moraga, Anzaldúa was deeply invested in imagining or reimagining nation. In Anzaldúa's vision of the "new mestiza" in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, similar anxieties and ambivalence seem to be at work, as well as an idealistic hope for liberation via the development of a new individual and communal consciousness. As many of the attendants at the Anzaldúa public tribute testified, Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*, now in its

third edition from San Francisco-based Aunt Lute Books, has become something of a classic. I cannot count how many people, especially undergraduates, have told me stories of becoming feminists, realizing their alliances to others across race, or coming out to their families after reading Anzaldúa or taking a women's studies class in which they were exposed to her work. Queer or not, so many young people I have worked with, when encountering Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* for the first time, experience what Anzaldúa termed the "Coatlicue state," [2] an opening of consciousness. There are now conferences centered solely on Anzaldúa's scholarship and an organization called Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldúa (SSGA) started by Norma Cántu and colleagues in 2005.

In South Texas, Anzaldúa's homeland in the Mexico-U.S. border region, the Gloria Anzaldúa Legacy Project distributes printed quotes by Anzaldúa in leaflet form at various community sites, such as women's centers. And her work is now widely anthologized in readers used in women's and gender studies, ethnic studies, and literature courses. Many people I encountered at the 2009 SSGA conference in San Antonio reported that learning about Anzaldúa's concepts such as "mestiza consciousness" shifted their sense of their experience as divided selves, people of color trying to survive in an Anglo-dominated U.S. What their stories have in common is the struggle of feeling cut down the middle by a border within their consciousness, and the potential for theorizing ways to harness that

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[2] Coatlicue refers to the Ancient Aztec goddess of birth and death.

into a "facultad" they could use to skillfully rework the cultural clash they felt within and around them. For some, seeing Anzaldúa's work embraced by audiences beyond Chicanas created a space in which they could imagine themselves as welcome within a larger women's movement as well as within the Anglo-dominated academy.

Anzaldúan borderlands theory has been deployed as a critical lens for a multitude of marginalized experiences and cultures beyond the Chicana, Tejana, queer, feminist, academic, creative writer, activist position from which Anzaldúa developed her approach to understanding a mestiza or mixed-race experience along the border. Anzaldúa's border is both the physical borderlands where Mexico meets the U.S. boundary and the resulting hybrid, dynamic consciousness required of borderlands subjects. When Anzaldúa says in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, "The U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* [is an open wound] where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" (25), she refers to the harsh border conditions such as the impoverished colonias where maquiladora workers live in shacks without running water while the U.S.-based corporations profit from their exploited labor. Anzaldúa refuses to discount those violences and the real affects and effects of the lived experience along the border, where "before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture." Yet, beyond the actually existing border, Anzaldúa is also talking about a revolution of the mind, the psychic borderlands, where the mestiza must contend with the normalized daily violence and trauma of racism, sexism, and homophobia. Given the broad spectrum of interlocking oppressions with which Anzaldúa engages, such as

violence, homophobia, racism, and sexism, nearly any reader who is a member of a marginalized group can find resonance with Anzaldúa's mestiza consciousness and borderlands theory.

One of the initial intellectual questions that led me into this project was my desire to determine how—and whether—Anzaldúan borderlands teoria was still at work on, by, and for queers of color in the borderlands. Just looking around at the latest queer Chican@ and Latin@ cultural productions and social movements to which I had access, I felt a profound void compared to the prolific literary output of the 1970s and '80s—that is, until I came across writers such as Felicia Luna Lemus, Myriam Gurba, and Adelina Anthony. At first, I mourned the lack of a collective sense of loss, finding things like "pride fests" funded by Coors beer and assimilationist gay chambers of commerce, where there used to be pride marches and related radical rallies on the capitol lawn. Similarly, when I first encountered Lemus's writing, I worried about its apparent distance from the concerns of previous Chican@ literary texts, which were steeped in a collective sense of cultural loss. There did not seem to be the identifiable Chican@ racial or ethnic identity crisis. There did not seem to be the recognizably borderlands feeling of being in-between.

Instead, Lemus seems more interested in what happens when queers move within—and make—their own worlds. On a first reading, Lemus's narratives do not seem to fully acknowledge how much they are building upon the "feminist architecture" articulated by the likes of Anzaldúa and Moraga. But I then realized I may have misread what I now

see as a differing sense of loss, one that incorporates Chicanidad and queerness into a livable tension for the contemporary queer Chican@ subject. Lemus's queer characters did not seem explicitly torn between two worlds; however, they did have to navigate issues of sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity, and class. So why did I want the queer Chicanas, those of us Anzaldúa referred to as "nos/otras" (us/others), to still be evidently suffering? I wondered if my initial reading of Lemus held a fear that these next-generation queer Chicana texts buy into the mainstream notion that the U.S. is post-racial.

I suppose I wanted to test contemporary Chicana lesbiana texts against the borderlands legacy offered by Anzaldúa and so widely circulated in a kind of borderlands-effect or transcendent universalizing throughout various realms of cultural studies. Yet, it seemed to me that Lemus's work, with its queerly gendered Chican@s, was moving us beyond the borderlands mindset by deploying a process of what José Esteban Muñoz, after Michel Pêcheux and Norma Alarcón, calls "disidentification." Muñoz characterizes disidentification as “a performative mode of tactical recognition that various minoritarian subjects employ in an effort to resist the oppressive and normalizing discourse of dominant ideology" (97). Reading Lemus in this context opened up a way to engage with contemporary queer Chicana texts on their own terms, which includes, but is not limited to, an engagement with the Chicana lesbiana texts of the previous generation. Drawing on Muñoz, I read contemporary Chicana lesbiana texts that queer gender, such as Lemus's novels, as engaging in a complex process of disidentifying both with representations of white lesbianism as well as with heteronormative Chicanidad.

Disidentification, as I use it in this project, refers to the process of manipulating dominant markings of the queerly gendered racialized subject in order to distance oneself from the oppressively dominant systems of representation. In this process, the minoritized subject critiques or disavows dominant representations in order to point out their absurdity or harmfulness. Building on Muñoz's work, I argue that it is not merely racialized sexuality but also the queering of gender that becomes a site for disidentification to be played out and explored in post-borderlands texts. Additionally, while Muñoz focuses on performance, especially staged dramas and solo performance, I extend this critical approach into the realm of reading fictional representations. In Lemus's narratives, for example, characters are identified as being Chican@, but they reconfigure dominant tropes of that category through the performance of queer or non-normative genders. In the post-borderlands world, characters may be suggested to be Chican@ but do not struggle with what that may mean to them. They are also queer but do not necessarily struggle much with that either. Their struggles tend to coalesce around issues of non-normative gender expression or gender identity; they thus disidentify with Chicanidad and queerness through resignifying the relation between the two at the intersection of genderqueerness.[3] I use the term genderqueerness here to refer to non-normative gender expressions or identities that trouble the feminine/masculine binary. The term finds contemporary usage among queer youth who identify as neither female

[3] I discuss this term further in the chapter on Felicia Luna Lemus's fiction.

nor male or who embrace a fluidity of gender expressions or identities. I deploy the term here as a way of thinking through the intersections of queer gender and sexuality. As I engage with each text throughout this project, I will use and discuss the specific terms preferred by each cultural producer. While I realize this may be a problematic choice because the term can hold different meanings for different gender-nonconforming people[4], I find that the term genderqueerness provides a way to locate the complex relationship between gender and sexuality for the ambiguously gendered queer Chican@ bodies under consideration in the varied texts this project takes on.

Disidentification provides a more productive lens for reading gender transgressiveness in representations of queer Chicanas than applying a borderlands framework. It makes clear that a severely limiting aspect of Anzaldúa's borderlands approach is that it naively assumes a one-to-one relationship between disparate cultures. I agree with Muñoz's critique of Anzaldúa, in which he questions her formulation of the border-crossing mestiza, especially the queer mestiza, as the "supreme crosser of cultures." As Muñoz aptly points out, Anzaldúa's view "contains the potential for being too celebratory of queer diversity, and in doing so elides the recalcitrant racisms and phobias that are still present throughout queer culture" (138). By claiming that the new mestiza consciousness can transcend its double bind of being on the border between two cultures through a "tolerance for ambiguity," Anzaldúa's borderlands teoria does not fully

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[4] I am following the current usage by ALLGO: Queer People of Color Organization (http://www.allgo.org).

recognize the power differential between dominant and subjugated cultures, or it assumes it is easily possible to transcend said power differential through individual agency, the individual act of combining aspects of two opposing cultures.

Muñoz's theory of "disidentification" allows for the mestiza subject not just to tolerate ambiguity but to actually incorporate it, messiness and all, into her identity. Thus, disidentification recognizes the complex circulation of power and its effects. It also acknowledges that the marginalized subject makes choices, enacting some degree of agency around what aspects of the dominant culture to identify or dis-identify with.[5] The performance of Chicana queerness through disidentification scrambles the codes of gender and sexuality, queering not just sexuality but also gender. Thus, one's gender expression might be expressed and queered along a complexly shifting continuum of possible femininities and masculinities and combinations thereof.

One may say that post-borderlands culture is constructed via this interplay between gender and sexuality under the sign of queer. In this process, integral strategies are irreverence and a bold disregard for in-group conventions, along with the simultaneous re-writing of those conventions. Such rewriting takes into account the intersection of gender and sexuality and, in particular, gender identity, gender presentation, and the myriad complexities associated with them. Muñoz describes such a process as a type of

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[5] Although, as Muñoz rightfully contends, disidentification may mean taking the bad with the good; that is, we cannot nor would we necessarily want just to pick and choose only the positive aspects of a culture or identity.

"revisionary identification" (22), and I would modify this by suggesting the process involves a queering of identification. Muñoz understands his work to be carrying on the legacy of *This Bridge Called My Back* and characterizes his work, then to be "post-Bridge" (22); Norma Alarcón uses the term "post-Bridge" as well, in her article "The Theoretical Subject of *This Bridge Called My Back* and Anglo-American Feminism." Likewise, I consider my own project to be post-Bridge, as well as post-Borderlands.

A post-borderlands project makes borderlands theory an explicit object of study, testing and pushing the limits of how borderlands theory has become so infused into Chicana studies as to become a default way of seeing, deployed as a nearly automatic lens. Linda Martín Alcoff, in her article "The Unassimilated Theorist," reminds us of the necessity of critiquing the nearly automatic deployment of Anzaldúan thought. As Martín Alcoff notes, "...Anzaldúa's iconic status in feminism resulted in the contradiction of an iconoclast becoming the new standard" (255). Against this standardization within Chican@ studies, a post-borderlands approach looks for the places where borderlands theory does not quite fit or hold, where it may be helpful yet not enough. One of those significant fissures is around the nonnormatively gendered queer body that the texts I have selected put at the center of their narratives. In a historical moment popularly construed as post-racial, post-feminist, post-everything, Moraga's question about the queer Chican@ future takes on a different meaning beyond the literal. Her question prompts deliberation of how we think and read after Anzaldúa, after the Anzaldúan

moment. Reading after Anzaldúa does not necessarily mean reading without Anzaldúa; it means thinking with and also beyond.

When I first launched my research into this project, I was surprised that despite the growing body of Chicana lesbiana and queer literature, surprisingly few published scholarly studies of Chican@ literature have focused on contemporary queer cultural productions. In the past couple of years, that number has begun to increase only slightly. Recent contributions include work by critics Alicia Arrizón, whose *Queering Mestizaje* (2006) establishes a relation between mixed-race identity and sexuality, Marivel T. Danielson, whose book *Homecoming Queers* (2009) traces a wide array of themes across selections of queer Latina literature and performance, and Sandra K. Soto, whose work focuses primarily on 1980s and '90s Chican@ lesbian and gay literature, with some attention to the "pro-sex" subtext of Américo Parédes's fiction. My project contributes to these and intersecting conversations, filling critical gaps by focusing on the figure of the genderqueer or ambiguously gendered queer Chican@ body and also by taking into consideration the most contemporary cultural productions that bring us into the current century.

Through my queer readings of Chicana texts, I identify how the selected body of Chicana literature navigates post-borderlands culture. Some of the characteristics of the post-borderlands include a concern with individual and collective displacements and with drawing connections between historical trauma and queer deviance or transgression. This transgression may lie in non-traditional sexualities, hybrid identities, and cultural

processes such as mestizaje, unexpected or ambiguous gender expressions, or transnational crossings and cultural imaginaries.

The texts that I have selected for the study negotiate race, nation, class, sexuality, and gender as shifting aspects of identity that co-constitute, or intertwine inextricably into, a queered Chican@ subject. In other words, these multiple aspects interact with and problematize what it means to be Chican@. What interests me is how such subjects become constructed at the shifting nexus of multiple matrices of power and agency. Queer Chican@ cultural productions provide insight into how a subject becomes racialized, sexualized, gendered, and other-ized in a U.S. context.

The post-borderlands cartographies, such as Felicia Luna Lemus's fiction and Adelina Anthony's solo performances, engage in a combination of narrative and cultural strategies. Typically, they foreground the queer subject through characters, plots, contexts, and/or themes. Like many Chican@ cultural productions, these post-borderlands texts draw on both the real U.S./Mexico border as a geopolitical site of contention and the metaphor of a border/lands as a psychically troubled yet potentially liberating space. They extend this work further by interrogating the function of queerness in the definition of what it means to be Chican@ and vice-versa; in fact, I would argue that they depict queerness as an integral element of Chican@ identity.

In the post-borderlands, queer Chican@ subjectivity may be illegible by traditional Chican@s and Mexican@s yet integral to the sustainability/survival of Chican@s as a minority group in the hegemonic U.S. Like many Chican@ literary texts, post-

borderlands cultural productions displace the queer Chican@. Unlike many Chican@ literary texts, however, they do not always attempt to recuperate traditional or nationalistic definitions of Chican@. While borderlands and post-borderlands subjects have different ways of going about their cultural work, they each explore the queer subject's formation and the queer subject's contentious relationship to home. In some cases, that home is constituted by a homeland, Chican@ community, the mythical Aztlán, an imagined future, or some combination thereof.

My work also picks up where Catrióna Rueda Esquibel's *With Her Machete in Her Hand: Reading Chicana Lesbians* (2006) leaves off. Billed as "the first history of Chicana lesbian writing from the 1970s until today," Esquibel's book offers the first book-length critical study of Chicana lesbian literature. Esquibel sets out "to map the terrain of Chicana lesbian fictions," which she defines as "drama, novels, short stories by Chican@ authors that depict lesbian characters or lesbian desire" (1). While I am interested in cultural productions across genres, I am also not exclusively interested in literary productions by authors who identify as Chicana lesbians. I am interested, however, in considering literary representations that contribute to the construction of the Chicana lesbian or queer in the popular imagination.

In her readings of Chicana lesbian fictions, Esquibel is largely concerned with how they represent various icons of Chicana femininity and sexuality, such as the Aztec princess Ixtacihuatl, la Llorona, and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Esquibel performs close readings of texts that queer these traditional figures. Esquibel's study may successfully

provide “a first full map” of Chicana lesbian literature and demonstrate how Chicana lesbian fictions are engaged in making community and making history. In examining how Chicana lesbian fictions have taken on these figures from a queer perspective, Esquibel argues that much of Chicana lesbian literature has sought to prove the existence of Chicana lesbians by creating histories through fictions. I depart from Esquibel here in that I do not agree that post-borderlands texts try to prove that Chicana queers exist. Instead, post-borderlands texts seek to represent queer Chicanas as part of a larger Chican@ imaginary.

Building on this model, my work maps a post-borderlands framework onto a body of Chicana lesbian literature in order to yield further insights into how these texts make Chican@ community and history, particularly by disrupting the traditional gender binary of male/female. Furthermore, Esquibel's analysis, like the majority of queer Chican@ studies projects, focuses only on lesbian and gay sexualities, without much attention to bisexual, transgendered, or gender variant queer identities, a significant critical gap I wish to help address with my work.

Situating my project within the fields of queer Chican@ and Latin@ cultural studies, I want to emphasize how my work draws on queer cultural studies and feminist theory, especially women-of-color feminisms. In particular, Chela Sandoval's interdisciplinary study *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000) offers an innovative and productive dialogue among U.S. third world feminisms such as Gloria Anzaldúa’s and the work of major Western cultural theorists such as Michel Foucault, Frederic Jameson,

Roland Barthes, and Donna Haraway. Traversing a wide terrain of critical theory, Sandoval astutely outlines the various tactics that combine the political, cultural, and aesthetic resistances of U.S. third world feminists. Like Muñoz's disidentification, or Alarcón's "identity-in-difference,"[6] Sandoval describes an effective strategy of "nomadic morphing" or "principled conversions" (62). Via the process of "principled conversions," the oppressed employ a methodology of "differential oppositional consciousness" by exposing the "expressions of power as consensual illusions." The aim is toward "intervening in and transforming social relations." While the nomadic morphing of the genderqueer subjects I examine ranges from "principled conversions" or conscious political choices to decisions of survival, it is by remixing the culturally accepted codes of Chican@ and queer that the genderqueer or queerly gendered subjects in this project enact such differential oppositional consciousness.

My work is also influenced by Emma Pérez, whose *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (1999) levels a Chicana feminist critique of Foucault. According to Pérez, "the decolonial imaginary" is a form of resistance to the colonial imaginary that has dominated the writing of histories. The decolonial imaginary can be described as the "interstitial space" (49) or the space within the "decolonial time lag" (14), where for example, the colonized becomes the postcolonial or decolonized, or the modern becomes the postmodern. The decolonial imaginary is that interstitial space in

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[6] See Alarcón's "Chicana Feminism: In the Tracks of 'The' Native Woman" (380) in *Living Chicana Theory* (1998), edited by Carla Trujillo.

which one attempts to redefine a liberatory subjectivity beyond the limits of that imposed by the colonizer. Pérez's theory of the "decolonial imaginary" extends Gloria Anzaldúa's "mestizaje consciousness," as a place where we can transcend the limits of traditional Western binaries, and Chela Sandoval's "differential consciousness," which "allows for a mobility of identities between and among various power bases" (xvi). The "decolonial imaginary" provides a stepping stone for interpreting the transition occurring in this historical moment of the post-borderlands.

Pérez's idea of a decolonial imaginary helps me to locate the queer post-borderlands Chican@ subject somewhere between internal colonization and diaspora, in a psychosocial place full of potentiality. Overall, I contend that using this post-borderlands lens provides a productive way to read contemporary queer Chican@ texts by moving the critical conversation beyond the limiting debates of essentialist identity politics as well as the tried and trite notion of the borderlands as always liberating.

To this end, Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano's innovative work in queer Chican@ studies has prompted me to insist on a dynamic use of multiple modes of analysis. In *The Wounded Heart: Writing on Cherríe Moraga* (2001) and in "Sexuality and Chican@ Studies: Toward a Theoretical Paradigm for the Twenty-First Century," Yarbro-Bejarano argues that Chican@ criticism must take into account multiple categories of analysis such as race, class, gender, and sexuality in order to avoid allowing one such mode to ignore or erase the concerns of another. In this study, I try to maintain these concerns, particularly at the less explored intersection of race and ethnicity with queer gender and

sexuality in contemporary Chican@ cultural productions, particularly those that foreground queer subjects and their unreadable, transgressive subjectivities. Because of their concern with transgressions across socially imposed boundaries of identity and desire, such texts are steeped in a strong sense of grief, or what several literary critics such as José Esteban Muñoz characterize as "racial melancholy." Such transgression and pervasive racial melancholy continue to place, and displace, the queer Chican@ subject in a contentious relationship to Chican@ communities.

While many of the cultural productions I analyze are by queer writers or about queer subjects, in order to explore unexpected relationships, I also wish to engage normative texts, which are either heteronormative or not usually considered queer. Ultimately, I am interested in not just the queer subject, queer author, or queer text, but how queerness contributes to an ongoing project of constituting a Chican@ subject/ivity. As such, my work seeks to analyze how contemporary Chican@ texts themselves theorize and figure queerness in the Chican@ cultural imaginary.

Interrogating the tensions between Chicanidad and queerness, the texts discussed in the project seek to claim love and loss as productive sites of knowing and meaning for queers of color engaging in what theorist Roderick A. Ferguson, in *Aberrations in Black*, terms "queer of color critiques" in their daily lives and in their literary pursuits. Through this project, I want to construct an archive of border queerness, queerness that may or may not be queer or known or even fully knowable as queer. I also want to assemble an unexpected archive, one with unrecognizable and perhaps irreverent objects not

necessarily considered as belonging in a collection of queer things. It is such queer irreverence, a beautiful and dangerous coping strategy, that results in queer mini-revolts like Alma Lopez's exquisitely defiant "Our Lady" on exhibit in mainstream art museums, my poet-friend Lorenzo Herrera y Lozano refusing to be exoticized by white men while cruising, or my anti-marriage partner, trained Lesbian Avenger fire-eater, agreeing to marry me at the San Francisco City Hall just to put queer love on public record.

Working in the traditions of Moraga, Anzaldúa, Ana Castillo, Emma Pérez, Juana María Rodriguez, and other Chicana and Latina lesbiana and queer writers, I put myself in the center of my story and include my own experience alongside my readings of cultural histories and literatures. To this effect, I sometimes find it necessary to mix modes, perhaps queering the form of a traditionally disciplined academic project. Like Ana Castillo's literary experience *The Mixquihala Letters*, which invites its readers to begin wherever their desire leads rather than reading the text in a linear fashion (although reading it in order works, too), I envision this dissertation as disrupting a chronological narrative. As the project moves forwards and backwards through time in order to reconsider shifting notions of how Chicanidad and queerness intersect, I invite readers to enter the project's conversation where their interests and points of intersection lead them. Each chapter serves as a node through which I invite the reader to think with me about what it means to embody race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and other categories of experience into a literary text.

I describe the methodological orientation of this project as enacting what I call "critical jotería studies." "Jotería" is a Chican@ term for queer people, and this culturally specific term captures the culturally specific focus and aims of the project. The project stages a dialogue between Chican@ cultural studies and queer theory, domains that have only somewhat recently begun to pay heed to the crucial contributions of the other. Through these intersecting methods, I contribute to Chicano-izing and Latino-izing—or mestiza-izing and racially mixing queer studies as well as in a critical joteando/queering of Chican@ studies.

Following Domino Renee Perez and other Chican@ Studies scholars, I use the hybrid term Chican@, shifting away from the use of the slash, or the more cumbersome spelling out of both words, as in "Chicana and Chicano." Hence, I use "Chican@" because of its effective simplicity (as it compounds the "a" and "o" feminine and masculine endings) and because of the visual disruption it causes by not following standardized stylistic rules.[7] In some places in this study, I also use the term Mexican American and admittedly sometimes use Chican@ and Mexican American interchangeably in order to trouble the political distinctions between the terms. I use Latina, Latino, or the combination Latin@ when referring to Latin@ groups other than Mexican Americans or Chican@s.

I also follow D. R. Perez's model that seeks to "privilege the work of Chican@ and

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[7] See D. R. Perez 210 n.6 for a thorough explanation of the graphical symbol.

Latin@ studies' scholars" (7). Likewise, I draw on Juana María Rodriguez's commitment to deploying culturally specific terms that capture the nuances of practices, identities, and attitudes that comprise queer Latinidad. In her critical work, Juana María Rodriguez chooses culturally specific terms to denote Latin@ queerness. In *Queer Latinidad*, explaining her preference for the terms "divas, atrevidas, and entendidas," Rodriguez asserts that these terms that "resonate with an attitude that steps beyond sexual practice or sexual identity into the realm of a politicized passion for liberation and empowerment" (24). As Rodriguez notes, "In Spanish, there is no direct translation for 'queer'" (24).

This linguistic gap due to non-translatable language captures the un-assimilable excesses of the unreadable, illegible, or ambiguously gendered bodies that stand at center stage in this project. Thus, I am not merely using "queer" as a simple umbrella term to try to be all-inclusive of the range of identities such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, transsexual, intersexed, questioning, and the myriad other non-heterosexual or non-normatively gendered identity categories that refer to same-sex desire and self-labels based on gender, sexual preference, identity, orientation, or sexual practice. I am also using "queer" here to mean not just non-heterosexual sexuality but also non-normative gender expression. Additionally, I use it to signify the desire to disrupt normalized categories of social location.

I am aware of the somewhat contentious history the term "queer" has in some communities of color, including for Chican@s. In her essay entitled "To(o) Queer the Writer," Anzaldúa rejects the terms lesbian and queer for "representing an English-only

dominant culture" (263). Instead, she chooses a Nahuatl term, "patlache," to identify her love for other women.[8] Moving away from Anzaldúa in this regard, I have opted to use the language featured in the texts and cultural productions included in this study, many of which use the word "queer" or other terms such as "bucha," or "marica," which will be addressed later. Many of the contemporary cultural producers I discuss express increasing alignment with the use of the term "queer" (ALLGO 2005, Luz Calvo 2009, Adelina Anthony 2009, Raquel Rodriguez 2009). It can be said that the term queer is to lesbiana as the term Chican@ is to Mexican American. The latter is sometimes accused of being too mainstream or accommodationist, while the former is usually considered more politically oppositional or radical. When the cultural producers specifically prefer a term such as "lesbiana" or "jota," I try to honor as much as possible their preferences in self-naming. Though all of the texts in this study are by Mexican American women, some of their texts deal with gay men and queerly gendered bodies that defy categorization. Thus, I use queer to signify an interpretive openness in my desire to remain attentive to the possibilities of the Chican@ queer.

The structure of this project moves from the most contemporary twenty-first century representations of Chicana queerness, as in the plays of the Butchlalis and Adelina Anthony, back towards the 1930s fiction of Jovita González, whose work I read

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[8] In some of her other writings, Anzaldúa refers to herself as a "half-and-half" or "mita' y mita' (short for "mitad y mitad), citing it as a term that "queer women are called in South Texas" (*The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* 141).

as an antecedent to Chicana lesbian feminist concerns of the late twentieth century. The fictional time imagined in these texts spans from the U.S. invasion of Mexico in 1846 to the 1960s and '70s Chicano Movement, to the punk scene of the 1990s, to the destruction of the U.S. World Trade Center towers on September 11, 2001. Significantly, these texts place the queer Chican@ at the center of those transformative historical moments. With this non-chronological approach, I begin with the most recent texts to engage with the questions of queer gender and sexuality taken up by this project in order to ascertain their contributions to queer Chicana literature.

The geographic and spatial locations of queer Chican@s in the texts are as varied and shifting as the times represented. The settings shift from major urban Latin@ centers to small rural towns. The Butchlalis and Adelina Anthony deal primarily with East Los Angeles as a site of queer Latina and Chicana experience, although Anthony hails from San Antonio and has begun using San Antonio as the setting for more recent work. [9] Jovita González's work, like Anzaldúa's, is deeply concerned with the South Tejas region along the border between Mexico and the United States. Lemus's fiction takes us from Los Angeles to New York City, effectively shifting the center of gravity of traditionally canonical representations of Mexican Americans as rooted in the U.S. Southwest. Lemus moves toward a more expansive Greater Mexico (a la Américo Paredes), depicting an

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[9] Adelina Anthony's work-in-progress *Bruising for Besos* explores domestic violence in a Chican@ household in 1980s San Antonio, her hometown.

even more amorphous and diffused diaspora of Mexican Americans across the full range of the U.S. landscape.

Generationally speaking, the Butchlalis and Adelina Anthony represent the current generation of Chicana and Latina queer writers, all born after 1970. They have been directly influenced by the previous generation of authors in that they have been mentored by Cherríe Moraga, with Anthony being trained by Moraga in the Stanford theater program. Lemus is also of this contemporary generation of writers, and her writing was first published in the late 1990s. Rocky Gamez is a writer whose short stories first appeared in print in the 1970s and 1980s, and not much is known about her biography, but the first-person narrator of her short stories comes from and returns to the Rio Grande Valley of South Tejas. Viramontes complicates an attempt to make a strict generational distinction among the authors, as she is a veterana of the Chicano Movement like Anzaldúa and Moraga and remains on the forefront of innovative Chican@ literary production, pushing representations of Chicana queerness into new territory beyond even some of her queer authorial counterparts. González is the earliest of these writers (González died in 1983), and her 1930s fiction extends the history of Chicana lesbian feminist writing decades before the Chicano Movement.

Traversing back and forth through time and place, the genderqueer Chican@ characters in these texts certainly navigate some of the most persistent themes of Chican@ literature: home/land, familia, relationship to history, and loss. Nonetheless, the bringing together of these texts here is not meant to be a survey of representations of

queer genders in Chican@ literature. Rather, through such layering of history, place, and generation, the project keeps a kind of queer time, troubling what a generation is, troubling what lineage is. As Jack Halberstam asserts, "…there is such a thing as 'queer time' and 'queer space'" (1), and accounting for such queer time and place requires taking into account non-chronological and non-biological accountings of time.

Tracking the figure of the genderqueer, or what Halberstam calls "figurations of ambiguous embodiment" (17), across the Chican@ timescapes and landscapes of these texts, the project begins and ends in Tejas. The project begins looking at the butch Chicana, then examines ambiguously gendered queer characters who destabilize the legibility of racial and ethnic categories, then ends by considering the effeminate man who resists his father's patriarchal and violent form of Mexican masculinity in favor of a queer artistic future.

The chapter "Buchas, Marimachas y Chingonas: The Contested Terrain of Chicana Butch," traces the figure of the butch in Chicana literature and performance. I begin by outlining the tendency in Chicana literature to use butchness or female masculinity to signify lesbianness, beginning with the butch works of Cherríe Moraga and Rocky Gamez. These authors utilize the figures of the strong butch, failed butch, baby butch, and proto-queer tomboy to expose and embrace the sexual and emotional vulnerability of Chicana borderlands butchness. After demonstrating how these fictional texts laid the groundwork for establishing the butch as a prominent Chicana queer figure, I examine how a new generation of Chicana writers and performance artists stage Chicana

butchness. Through close readings of Adelina Anthony's "Mastering Sex and Tortillas" and the Butchlalis de Panochtitlan's "Barber of East L.A.," I consider how this new order of Chicana butches both draws on and critiques traditional Chicana butchness. This chapter discusses the tensions within representations of Chicana butchness. Moreover, it provokes a reconsideration of the tension and distance between Chicana butch representations and white feminist portrayals of lesbian gender.

The second point of entry into the discussion, "Illegible Genders in the Fiction of Felicia Luna Lemus," locates transgendered Chican@s crossing boundaries of gender and geography in twenty-first century urban cityscapes. The fiction of Felicia Luna Lemus continues to displace the queer Chicana@ out of both Mexican and Anglo communities yet rejects many identitarian positions claimed by her borderlands predecessors. Lemus's narratives produce queer Chican@s as unreadable subjects that blur the lines between genders, resulting in the loss of their readability as Chican@ by other Chican@s. Lemus mobilizes this sense of cultural loss in order to assert new subjectivities surprisingly centered not around race/ethnicity or sexuality but around non-normative genders. Lemus's characters extend the geographic boundaries of Chicanidad from Los Angeles to New York; her work also moves away from the borderlands struggles with mainstream white feminism and heteronormative Chicanidad toward the uncharted borderlands of genderqueerness, where it is not race or same-sex desire but gender expression that displaces queerness from contemporary Aztlán.

The chapter "Engendering a Queer Time and Place in Viramontes's *Their Dogs Came with Them*" examines the queering of racialized gender. Viramontes' novel is partly historical fiction and partly speculative fiction with science fiction elements. In a dystopian East Los Angeles during the Chicano Movement, Viramontes' character Turtle is born female but lives as a young man on the streets, seeking to survive in a gang culture that values and depends on violent masculinities. Turtle's marginalized and unreadable body serves as both shelter and threat, and her queerness hovers as a ghostly possibility that seems inevitably lost. Viramontes uses the figure of the ambiguously gendered queer racial body to subvert the genre conventions of the queer coming-out narrative and the Chican@ coming-to-consciousness identity struggle, leaving her story as an emblem of disidentification.

The chapter entitled "Long Before *Brokeback Mountain*: The Queer Case of Jovita González's *Caballero*" recovers lost queer Chican@s in the early U.S./Mexico borderlands. Looking backward to earlier Mexican American letters, my queer reading of Jovita González's recovered 1930s novel *Caballero* reconfigures traditional Chican@ and Latin@ literary histories by showing how this early writing used genderqueerness to critique Mexican and Anglo policing of boundaries against cross-racial and same-sex desire. I contend that it is not just race or class or gender or sexuality but genderqueerness that provides a mechanism through which González constructs an alternative affective, queer history of the Mexican American borderlands that explores the fear of colonial domination, particularly through the feminization of culture and the expressions of non-

heteronormative sexualities and genders. My queer reading of González's recovered fiction claims the author as a contributor to a queer Mexican American archive and demonstrates how her work prefigures the Chicana lesbian feminist concerns of the later twentieth century and of this post-borderlands moment.

As we travel through the post-borderlands with these texts, we begin to see how they construct a post-borderlands culture. If we take the Butchlalis at their word that "every barrio has its macha," then what can we learn from those machas, marimachas, buchas, maricas, and other genderqueers, ambiguously gendered, queerly gendered border-crossers who have already crossed and are now imagining further possibilities?

This post-borderlands approach that I am proposing to critical jotería studies is guided by three concerns. The first concern is centering non-normative genders as legitimate, distinctive modes of expressing and performing Chican@ queerness. The next major concern is expanding notions of and definitions of allowable, legible, or readable queerness. Finally, it is concerned with disrupting chronological time and fixed place to offer a queer time and place for Chican@ queer experience.

Another way to look at this critical framework is to consider the question asked by the post-borderlands subject. The borderlands subject of much canonical Chican@ literature tends to ask the question, "Who am I?" The queer subject of many gay and lesbian coming-out narratives has asked, "Who am I if I am not straight, and where is my place?" One response for the queer subject is the assertion, like the activists of Queer Nation, "We're here, we're queer. Get used to it." In post-borderlands culture, the queer

Chican@ says, "I am Chican@, I am queer. And I'm here. What happens if and when people do not get used to it?

My project seeks to extend previous work on Chicana@ literature by taking into consideration multiple culturally-based categories of analysis without privileging one category at the expense or erasure of another (for example, considering class to trump race or vice versa). I also hope to contribute to conversations that shift the focus away from the ongoing culture wars over essentialist definitions of identity and toward a focus on relationships between the personal and the collective imaginary, particularly for transgressive subjects and subjectivities. Ultimately, what I am proposing here is a way of reading Chican@ literature that queers traditional notions of Chicanidad and Chicana@ cultural studies by allowing texts and subjects to set the terms of their own meaning-making. Thus, I must consider how others have defined and responded to Chicanidad and queerness as I critically engage the literature in order to investigate how a Chican@ borderlands subject negotiates multiple aspects of identity race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, ability, geographic place, shifting sites of power and disenfranchisement simultaneously.

My project engages the shifting terrain of Chican@ queer experience in the post-borderlands while remaining attentive to what gets lost when strides forward seem to be made across new borders. My work expands the analytical categories of gender and sexuality to account for racialized transgressiveness and queer genders beyond feminine/masculine and homosexual/heterosexual binaries. Tracking the non-normative

queer subject via figures such as the transgendered, genderqueer, effeminate, and butch Chicana@, I show how these non-normative genders inflect how racialized and ethnic subjectivities get constituted. By approaching gender and sexuality as multivalent categories of analysis, I counter the received notion that Chicana lesbian literature began and peaked in the late twentieth century and situate queerness as a formidable yet unacknowledged presence in the formation of the Chican@ cultural imaginary and the Chicana@ literary canon.

I began this introduction with a reflection on the significance of the loss of Anzaldúa in 2004. Before delving into the next chapter, I leave you with a new image of Anzaldúa, one designed in honor of the new Gloria E. Anzaldúa Student Activities Room, to be inaugurated by the Center for Mexican American Studies at The University of Texas at Austin in 2010 (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. This poster (2010), designed by Sara Sage, will welcome visitors to the new Gloria E. Anzaldúa Student Activities Room, inaugurated by the Center for Mexican American Studies at The University of Texas at Austin in 2010.

Unlike some of the extremely feminine photographs of the early Anzaldúa circulated after her death, this art emphasizes a more masculinely gendered Anzaldúa, wearing a work shirt and a very short hair cut. Behind her is a desert landscape, and Anzaldúa seems to have emerged from the barren land preserving a stone tablet as an emblem of Mexican@ and Chican@ history. The parched and cracked landscape brings to mind Anzaldúa's commitment to forging coalitional bridges across differences, particularly for queer women of color feminists. Anzaldúa asserts that "…the ground of our being is a common ground, la Tierra" and that "…at all times we must stand together despite, or because of, the huge splits that lie between our legs, the faults among feminists like the fractures in the earth. Earthquake country, these feminisms" (*The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* 141). Evoking the image of *Las Madres* in which the Indigenous mother holds the earth, Anzaldúa—with her large brown hands—holds a stone depicting the Nahuatl moon goddess Coyolxauhqui. The stone resembles the one excavated from the Templo Mayor in Mexico City in 1978, confirming the significance of the female deity to the ancient Aztec civilization (Taube 49). According to the Nahuatl legend, Coyolxauhqui's brother Huitzilopochtli murdered her for threatening their mother Coatlicue, and after killing Coyolxauhqui, he threw her dismembered, naked body into the sky to become the moon so that their mother Coatlicue would be consoled by being able to gaze upon her each night.

Anzaldúa drew upon the Coyolxauhqui legend as a metaphor for Chican@ experience. In her last published essay, she extended this metaphor to people of color in

the U.S.: "So that white Americans can keep their illusions of safety and entitlement unmarred, our government sets up oppressive measures such as racial profiling which make people of color feel disposable, perpetually unsafe, and torn apart like Coyolxauhqui" (One Wound for Another/*Una herida por otra* 97). In another of her later essays, she claimed that the writer's job "is to bear witness to what haunts us, to step back and attempt to see the pattern in these events (personal and societal), and how we can repair el daño (the damage) by using the imagination and its visions" (93); she saw herself as a writer engaged in "the Coyolxauhqui imperative" (*This Bridge We Call Home* 5), imagining ways to heal, to repair el daño.

While many Chicana lesbian writers have reimagined the traitorous icon of La Malinche, Cortéz's translator, as a symbol of queer mestiza empowerment, I suggest that the figure of Coyolxauhqui offers a more apt analogy for the Chicana genderqueer figure. Although often referred to as female, some Nahuatl stone glyphs actually refer to Coyolxauhqui as being dually sexed, representing both male and female powers. Just as the fragmented body of Coyolxauhqui is both female and male, dead and reborn, reconstituted and reimagined, the butch, transgendered, and other queerly gendered Chican@s in this project refashion and reformulate themselves into quintessential post-borderlands Chican@ subjects, crossing borders of gender and sexuality even Anzaldúa may not have imagined.

Marimachas and Chingónas: The Contested Terrain of Chicana Butch

It is our experience that all language for talking about butches and fems is inadequate.

—Liz Kennedy and Madeline Davis in *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*

'Lesbian' doesn't name anything in my homeland.

—Gloria Anzaldúa, in "To(o) Queer the Writer—Loca, escritora y chicana"

I am going back to all those streets to work the pain. The pain is never going to work me.

—Chonch Fonseca, the butch protagonist in *The Barber of East L.A.*

Figure 4: Promotional flyer for the Butchlalis.

Three young butch Latinas in black suits stand on the steps of a spiral staircase (Figure 4). Two of them stare directly at the camera, intent on holding the viewer's gaze. One looks off into the distance, as if noticing someone or something more important beyond the horizon. The butch who stands front and center appears to be the group's jefe, with the other two manly women flanking her, homebois at her back. The staircase curves upward out of the frame. A message, emblazoned in red and bold uppercase, is superimposed over the black-and-white photograph: "Smart butches exist. They have

opinions. They have feelings. They have politics, too." The message ends with contact information and a call to book the group for public performances, making it clear that this is a promotional flyer. The women are the Butchlalis de Panochtitlan, a performance troupe composed of Mari Garcia, Raquel Gutierrez, and Claudia Rodriguez. The physical posturing combined with the defensive rhetoric seems designed to simultaneously inspire radical queer identification and incite confusion from the conservatively straight and straight-laced. Apparently the Butchlalis did not get the mainstream memo about the assimilationist gay agenda that encourages queers to make nice and act normal. Or more accurately, they did get the memo, and this is their creative retort. So, why are these butches ready to throw down? Who are they talking to? And where did they get those fabulous suits?

In their provocative performances, the Butchlalis enact what queer activists Marcia Ochoa and Nancy Mirabal call "tetatúd," actitud con tetas (attitude with tits—perhaps bound or purposefully hidden in this case), an in-your-face stance toward Latina sexuality (Rodriguez 67). The promotional flyer uses tetatúd to challenge a matched set of cultural assumptions: butches don't think, don't care, don't feel, don't act. These cultural assumptions associate the lack of thinking, caring, feeling, or acting with traditionally restrictive and limiting masculinity. The Butchlalis' message raises critical questions about the cultural work of butchness. What does it mean to think, opine, and feel butch or butchly? What are butch politics? More broadly, what are the contemporary challenges posed to and by the circuits of butch-femme desire and lesbian gender?

Cultural productions and interventions such as those by the Butchlalis offer radical possibilities for reworking understandings of butch as racialized sexuality. This chapter looks to such Chicana butch literary and cultural productions to grapple with these questions in illuminating the psychological and cultural geographies of Chicana lesbian borderlands experience.

In this chapter, I will demonstrate how contemporary representations of Chicana butch distinguish themselves from cultural productions depicting a white female masculinity. These butch Chicana texts disrupt the dominative narrative offered by white butch texts. While some white butch texts have claimed that butch identity became passé and then regained popularity, the texts I will discuss disprove such a claim within a Chicana context.

In Chicana lesbian literature and performance, the figure of the butch is not hard to find. In this chapter, I will examine the tendency in Chicana literature to use butchness or female masculinity to signify lesbianness, such as in the butch works of Cherríe Moraga and Rocky Gamez. These authors utilize the figures of the strong butch, failed butch, baby butch, and proto-queer tomboy to expose and embrace the sexual and emotional vulnerability of Chicana borderlands butchness. I will focus on the under-examined short fiction of Rocky Gamez, whose work has been anthologized but not often discussed in critical texts. After demonstrating how Gamez's and Moraga's texts helped lay the groundwork for establishing the butch as a prominent Chicana queer figure, I examine how a new generation of Chicana writers and performance artists stage Chicana

butchness. I turn to butch performance because, as critic Alicia Arrizón points out, performance "becomes a vehicle through which the body is 'exposed and multiply delineated" (*Latina Performance* 73), thereby exposing the intersections of queerness through the performance and performativity of gender and sexuality. Through readings of Adelina Anthony's "Mastering Sex and Tortillas" and the Butchlalis de Panochtitlan's "Barber of East L.A.," I consider how this new order of Chicana butches both draws on and critiques traditional Chicana butchness. Throughout my reading of these texts, I remain attentive to questions of what and how butch means in a Chicana context. Specifically, I am interested in the Chicana butch struggle to find a place within Chican@ community, how and why the butch Chicana gets displaced, and the effects of Chicana butch (dis-)placements on the constructions of Chicanidad and queerness.

Within a queer Chican@ context, a butch might be described by a variety of culturally specific terms. While the terms "tortillera," "jota," or "lesbiana" might be used to describe a Chicana lesbian, they refer generally to the category of sexuality, to women who sexually desire other women. They do not necessarily specify the gender expression, gender identity, or gender orientation of the Chicana lesbian. A tortillera, jota, or lesbiana might be feminine or masculine, genderqueer, transgendered, or might exhibit a widely divergent range of other genders. While the term "lesbiana" has gained increased usage in the past decade, it seems to circulate primarily within academic realms. Cultural theorist Gloria Anzaldúa rejected the term "lesbian" or the translated "lesbiana" as not resonating with her experience as a queer Tejana, or Mexican Texan:

"For me the term lesbian *es problemón*. As a working-class Chicana, mestiza—a composite being, *amalgama de culturas y de lenguas*—a woman who loves women, 'lesbian' is a cerebral word, white and middle-class, representing an English-only dominant culture, derived from the Greek word *lesbos*" ("To(o) Queer the Writer" 263). For Anzaldúa, being a mestiza/mixed-race person and being an amalgam of cultures and languages required a mixture of terms. Being a Chicana woman who loves women required at the very least a culturally specific term, and Anzaldúa identified "most closely with the Nahuatl term 'patlache,'" which describes a woman who forms an intimate connection with another woman. Patlache, however, is not a gendered or queerly gendered term for lesbian.

When referring to a masculine Chicana lesbian in particular, some might use the term "chingóna." Chingóna refers to a bad-ass, one who expresses attitude, cockiness, self-assured (female) masculinity. Chingóna distinguishes one from "La Chingada," or "the Fucked One," a vulgar colloquialism for la Malinche, or Malintzín, purportedly the mistress of Hernán Cortez and often cast by Mexican legend as both mother of and betrayer of the Mexican mestizo or mixed-race people. As a chingóna, a Chicana butch is one who not only prefers to fuck rather than be fucked in terms of lesbian sex, but also is one who fucks gender, fucks with gender, fucks things up, questions the boundaries and limits of traditional authority. In a queer or lesbian Chicana context, particularly in S/M subculture, a chingóna might also refer to a top, or one who tops, dominates, or controls the sexual scene. Cherríe Moraga asserts that "no one wants to be the fucked

one," as being la chingóna signifies a desirable position of power. Whatever the particulars of a Chicana dyke's sexual practices may be, the stance of the chingóna offers radical opposition to the mestiza chingada.

Moraga also articulates her chingóna-ness in *Loving in the War Years* as a desire to move a woman emotionally and physically—literally move a woman, in bed and on the dance floor:

> And I move women around the floor, too—women I think enamored with me. My mother's words rising up from inside me—'A *real* man, when he dances with you, you'll know he's a *real* man by how he holds you in the back.' I think *yes*, someone who can guide you around a dance floor and so, I do. Moving these women kindly, surely, even superior. *I can handle these women*. They want this. And I do too. (31-32)

As Moraga works to untangle her understanding of her own butch orientation in her mixed-genre memoir, she complicates Chicana butchness beyond this initial description of a simple desire to control other women's bodies physically.

Chicana literary critic Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano's astute and in-depth readings of Moraga's writings offer insight into Moraga's conception of the relationship between her sexual self and her gendered self. In *The Wounded Heart*, Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano says of Moraga's writing, "In the writing of butch and *chingón* identifications as both sexual and gender constructions, Moraga's texts undertake a reading of cultural indoctrination and attempt to come to terms with it by representing lesbian sex, specifically butch-

femme identifications, as one imaginable engagement with the stigmatization of dominating-dominated polarities" (106). Moraga's exemplification of Chicana butch opens up the dominating-dominated binary even beyond Yarbro-Bejarano's estimation. Chingóna as a racialized gendered sexuality is not just about dominating in the style of the colonizer. For the Chicana butch, it can be about embodying the capacity to move others sensuously, sexually, and emotionally, which requires a facility with emotional expressiveness and empathy for the other.

Noting the often misrecognized butch capacity for feeling, queer theorist Ann Cvetkovich discusses Moraga's butch expression and expressiveness as an emotional style. In the essay entitled "Untouchability and Vulnerability: Stone Butchness as Emotional Style," published in *Butch/Femme: Inside Lesbian Gender*, edited by Sally R. Munt (1998), Cvetkovich asserts that butch is more than a visual or sexual style. Cvetkovich discusses "butchness as an emotional style, that is, as a set of conventions for expressing feeling" (159). Cvetkovich explains that in Moraga's butch writing, "[e]specially charged are the connections between penetration, public humiliation, and feminization" (162). According to Cvetkovich, Moraga is able to construct "butch identity in ways that do not demand a rejection of female vulnerability or womanliness, especially a femininity defined in terms of the capacity to feel" (163). It is noteworthy that Moraga negotiates these connections within a specifically Chican@ context. Cvetkovich elaborates by noting how "Moraga's understanding of butch sexuality as a response to colonialism's structures of feeling offers testimony to the difficulty of

representing feeling in terms other than stigmatized notions of vulnerability. The value of butch discourse is its power to articulate experiences of feeling that are not castigated as feminine or expected to take forms associated with mental and emotional health, such as openness or expressiveness" (164). Cvetkovich's explanation of butch as emotional style helps us read Moraga's butch emotional style as a chingóna. As Moraga's butch persona adopts an outward or visible masculinity, she can also be read as embodying an empowering form of gendered, feminine vulnerability.

Chingóna as a Chicana butch gender orientation finds some synergy with Carol Queen's descriptions of working-class butch. In *Real Live Nude Girl,* Queen offers a definition of butch that registers the tension between masculine and feminine and between visual and emotional styles by describing one of her lovers. She says that butch means "so deeply Not Feminine." In the chapter entitled "Why I Love Butch Women," Queen says butch is walking down the street with attitude, wearing jeans and white t-shirts and exhibiting "the kind of womanness that isn't taught in school," marking butch as non-conformist, non-academic, and circulating in a working-class street culture. Queen goes on to say that "Butch is a giant *Fuck YOU!* to compulsory femininity, just as lesbianism says the same to compulsory heterosexuality" (153). Emphasizing how butch, like femme, crosses traditional gender boundaries, Queen declares, "I love butch women because, in their big black boots, they step squarely across a line" (160). This juxtaposition of the not-feminine physical style and attitude with what Cvetkovich describes as a feminine emotional style makes it difficult to ascertain the gender of butch.

In *Butch is a Noun*, S. Bear Bergman professes to "know what butch is" and offers a humorous definition that contradicts itself every step of the way. For Chicana and other racialized butches, butch may be a matter of mixing sexual style with visual style as well as emotional style. While this may seem contradictory, it should be noted that the concept of butch itself is inherently paradoxical—and in the new cultural work this chapter explores, butch mixes genders, just as mestiza is based on a mixture of races.

Butch as a category of lesbian gender continues to be subject(ed) to definitional debates, suggesting its resistance to fixedness. Debates around butchness also signal ongoing attempts to regulate gender as well as to unseat it from its regulatory throne. The visible butch often gets read by the dominant gaze as a mode of cultural loss, wherein expressions of female masculinity get perceived merely as failed femininity. This misreading sets up the butch figure as inherently anti-feminine, conceptually trapping the definition of butch as against woman—and as a lesbian she is often assumed to be anti-man. So if the butch is only allowed to be considered man-hating and woman-hating, what is she presumed to be and to be for? Can butch identity be fully explained in terms of what queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz terms "disidentification," the disavowal of the normative or dominative and, if so, to what effect?

According to Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*, butch and femme are "historical identities of sexual style" (41). For Butler, butch identity involves the juxtaposition of masculine and feminine, particularly through the female resignification of the masculine:

> Within lesbian contexts, the 'identification' with masculinity that appears as

> butch identity is not a simple assimilation of lesbianism back into the terms of heterosexuality. As one lesbian femme explained, she likes her boys to be girls, meaning that 'being a girl' contextualizes and resignifies 'masculinity' in a butch identity. As a result, that masculinity, if that it can be called, is always brought into relief against a culturally intelligible 'female body.' (156)

In Butler's formulation, butch requires the presence of a readable "female body" onto which traditionally masculine codes can be reconstituted as a lesbian gender expression. The butch's subversive appropriation of masculinity for expression and use in what Butler refers to as "lesbian contexts" troubles the gender binary not just by mixing genders but also by intersecting gender expression with transgressive sexual orientation.

Representations of Chicana butchness explore a range of aspects of queer, masculine, working-class, Chicana, female experience. In doing so, Chicana butch texts shift dominant discourses about butchness. One dominant misconception is the trite idea that butch is a retrograde or misogynist form of gender identity or expression. The second is the idea that butch fell out of favor and then re-emerged onto the lesbian public scene. Addressing the first idea, Jack Halberstam's work in theorizing "female masculinity" attempts to recuperate butch and other masculine lesbian genders by recognizing them as existing along complex continuums of queer genders and sexualities. But the texts I will examine in this chapter also stretch the boundaries of gender expression to account for valences of race/ethnicity and class, and they engage female

masculinity, and butch in particular, as much more than a consciously adopted performance or matter of style.

The Chicana lesbian and queer cultural productions I examine in this chapter resist both of these dominant, limiting tropes of butchness. They also construct a particular idea of butch by interrogating how butch is racialized and gendered specifically in a Chican@ context. Within a Chican@ context, the butch figures in the texts I discuss here connect their sense of being butch with obtaining class mobility and cultural capital among other Chican@s.

Many other writers and scholars have taken up discussions of butch lesbian gender, with many focusing on its matter of visual style and its tenuous and shifting relationship to feminisms, including lesbian feminisms (Nestle 1992; Case 1993; Kennedy and Davis 1993; Faderman 1993; Burana and Due 1994; Halberstam 1998; Munt 1999). These valuable contributions to queer thought have helped document and legitimize butch and butch-femme as lesbian identity formations. Yet, few considerations of butch-femme in mainstream queer academic discourse adequately consider the relation between race or ethnicity to sexuality and gender. For my purposes, I am interested in how Chicana authors represent butch within Chican@ contexts, complicating the interconnectedness of identity formations along the lines of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, sex, gender, and gender expression.

The short fiction of Rocky Gamez, a writer from the lower Rio Grande Valley of South Tejas, provides a lens into the Chicana butch struggle to find a sense of belonging

within Chican@ community. Rocky Gamez's series of short stories centers around a working-class Tejana butch named Gloria, whose adventures are narrated by the character of Rocky. Gloria is a working-class lesbiana who lives in the Rio Grande Valley of South Tejas, and her friend Rocky is a lesbiana from the valley who has moved away to go to college. The first of the stories, called "From *The Gloria Stories*," was originally published in the journal *Conditions* in 1981 and has been anthologized in collections such as *Cuentos: Stories by Latinas* (edited by Moraga, et al., 1983) and Joan Nestle's iconic project *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader* (1992). The other two Gloria stories include "A Baby for Adela" and "A Matter of Fact," and all three deal with Gloria's desire to impregnate her girlfriend.

"From *The Gloria Stories*" begins with Rocky reminiscing about the "ridiculous" childhood aspirations she had: "I remember wanting to be an acolyte so badly I would go around bobbing in front of every icon I came across whether they were in churches or private houses. When this aspiration was forgotten, I wanted to be a kamikaze pilot so I could nosedive into the church that never allowed girls to serve at the altar" (202). The first image characterizes the young Rocky as an adoringly attentive, devoted altar-boy who is eager to please, while the second imagines a type of violent fantasy typically associated with traditional boys' play as a means for actively resisting institutionalized gender inequity in the Catholic church.

Then, Rocky claims to have changed as she grew up: "After that I made a big transition. I wanted to be a nurse, then a doctor, then a burlesque dancer, and finally I

chose to be a schoolteacher. Everything else was soon forgiven and forgotten." Notably, she goes from wishing for a traditionally feminine occupation, to a traditionally masculine one, to a blatantly pro-sex entertainment career, back to a traditionally feminine, normative mainstream occupation: schoolteacher. Rocky's aspirations are then contrasted with Gloria's: "My friend Gloria, however, never went beyond aspiring to be one thing, and one thing only. She wanted to be a man."

Rocky writes home to Gloria because she has heard rumors from friends in her hometown that Gloria has been going around dressed in drag, drinking heavily, and consorting with prostitutes. Rocky is alarmed at the news her sister writes to her about Gloria:

> One letter said that she [Rocky's sister] has spotted her in the darkness of a theater making out with another girl. Another letter said that she had seen Gloria coming out of a cantina with her arms hooked around two whores. But the most disturbing one was when she said that she had seen Gloria at a 7-11 convenience store, with a butch haircut and what appeared to be dark powder on the sides of her face to imitate a beard. (202)

Of concern to Rocky is her friend Gloria's public displays of gender and sexual non-conformity, in a region bound by the strong traditions of a conservative and predominantly Catholic working-class Mexican and Mexican American population. Also of concern to Rocky is Gloria's obsession with reproduction and her claim that she has the ability to get her girlfriend pregnant.

Rocky, whose own name strikes a Chicana butch chord, as "Rocky" or "Raque" can be a nickname for the name Raquel, seems oddly confused not by Gloria's sexual orientation or objects of desire but rather by her gender expression as overly mannish or masculine. Rocky responds by writing a letter to Gloria: "I quickly sat down and wrote her a letter expressing my concern and questioning her sanity." Gloria writes back to the friend, admitting to the behaviors and recounting the story of how she recently asked her girlfriend to marry her. The epistolary form details the exchange between the two friends across distance and gives way to prose narration when injuries from a car accident send Rocky back to the Rio Grande Valley to recuperate.

Besides the distance of geography, there is the distance between the educational attainment of the two friends, as Rocky had left home to go to college while Gloria remained in the valley to work. In another story in the Gloria series, Gloria quits her slaughterhouse job so that she and Rocky can work together selling brooms door-to-door. Because Rocky left for college away from the Rio Grande Valley, which has two universities that serve a predominantly Mexican American student population, we can perhaps presume that Rocky attends a faraway college more populated by whites than by Mexican Americans or Latinos. Rocky, when she comes home to intervene in Gloria's life, can be read as the voice of urban, educated, white feminists who engaged in dismissing butchness as undesirable or at the very least outmoded. This dismissal of butch and butch-femme gendered sexuality as a possible expression for lesbians can be found in works such as Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon's *Lesbian/Woman,* in which Martin

and Lyon charge that "[t]he minority of Lesbians who still cling to the traditional male-female or husband-wife pattern in their partnerships are more than likely old-timers, gay bar habituées, or working class women" (77). To their wholesale category of working class women, one could add women of color as practitioners of butch-femme expression or identity. Gamez critiques this line of thinking that attempts to discount the legitimacy or continued presence of butches and femmes in queer communities.

Like Gamez, Adelina Anthony's theatrical work raises questions about the significant cultural work of butch gender in queer Chicana communities. Her solo performance "Mastering Sex and Tortillas" has toured around the U.S., mostly in queer community centers and on college campuses. "Mastering Sex and Tortillas" stages the Chicana femme and the Chicana butch as inextricably connected yet often at odds—with themselves, with each other, with other queers, and with other Chican@s (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Adelina Anthony plays a butch (Papi Duro) and a femme (Mama Chocha) in her solo performance *Mastering Sex and Tortillas.*

Originally from San Antonio and now based in Los Angeles, Anthony is the founding director of a Los Angeles-based community organization called Lives United through Community, History, and Art (LUCHA), and is currently the director of a dynamic performance group called Teatro Q, which develops community-based theater in collaboration with Anthony and other queer Latin@ performers. Anthony's career was bolstered by her collaboration with Cherríe Moraga. Anthony directed Cherríe Moraga's *Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* at a community theater in Dallas before going to Stanford to study with Moraga in the graduate theater program, which Anthony left after a year to work as a full-time artist, citing what she describes as ideological differences between her aesthetics and politics and the program's traditional approach.[10]

Anthony chooses to identify herself as a "Xiqana," which has implications for how she shapes her performances around intersecting themes of race and sexuality (Interview). Like many other self-proclaimed Xicana feministas, Anthony uses the "X" as a reclamation of the Nahautl pronunciation of the letter "X" with a "ch" or "sh" sound and a rejection of the Spanish colonizers' mistranslation of Nahuatl words. According to Anthony, she also changes the middle letter in the traditional "Chicana" from a "c" to a "q" to signify queerness. Anthony describes her queerness as bound together with her Mexican and indigenous identities. Her decolonial politic seeks to rework language in order to accommodate her experience as a Xiqana.

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[10] Keynote Address, University of Texas at Austin, Latino Leadership Council, October 2009

The first time I saw Adelina Anthony do her solo performance of "Mastering Sex and Tortillas" was in East Austin at The Historic Victory Grill, a treasured gathering place for working-class black folks, musicians, poets, activists, and queers of color. It's the kind of place that has shower curtains separating the two toilets in the women's bathroom into make-shift stalls. To get to the back stall, you have to open the curtains and step through the first stall into the second, making this an awkward social maneuver when the first stall is occupied. And when you go to the bar, you better have cash—preferably small bills because they might not have much change on hand. And don't, whatever you do, do not ask for a fancy hipster drink or trendy imported beer. In other words, it's the kind of place where folks like me feel right at home, having grown up in a small barrio with at least four neighborhood cantinas, one of which operated out of a couple's silver mobile home trailer in a parking lot. The bar next door, called The Playroom, the one most frequented by my family, extended family, and neighbors, had two nice bartenders, a middle-aged Mexicana and a young Mexicano who called me by name, gave me free drinks, and never minded when I played the same song on the juke box over and over while I played pool. I was seven. The drinks were merely sodas, and I was often to be found sitting in a booth doing my homework while my family hung out on weekend, and some weekday, evenings. Perhaps my fond memories of The Playroom make The Victory Grill feel like arriving home. Or perhaps it's that the first year I lived in Austin, I had the good fortune to read poetry on stage there, alongside Joe Jimenez, Corrie Sublett-Berrios, and Pedro Pietri.

The night Adelina Anthony performed, the house was packed mostly with local queer activists and writers, as well as academics in town to attend the conference of the National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies. I had met Adelina but had yet to see her perform in person. Fifteen minutes after the show was scheduled to begin, people were still milling about, so I figured we were running on queer p.o.c. time. Then a woman stormed into the performance space from the grill area through the bar area. She was yelling something, and people were moving to get out of her way. Given my childhood barroom training, I assumed it was somebody who had tried to save a buck by getting drunk at home before coming to the bar and now she was pissed because they would not serve her any more alcohol. But when the spotlight lit up her face, I realized it must be the performer making a dramatic entrance, wearing dark sunglasses, crashing through the door, and yelling like a loca. The woman was wearing a very tight, very short black skirt that barely covered her nalgas, and she was tugging at the bottom of the skirt to keep it down while she walked through the crowd. Her curly hair was pinned up on the back of her head, with curls escaping here and there. And she was holding a cell phone to her ear, saying "Ay, Dolores, mi amor, mi vida, of course I love you." The performance had indeed begun.

The performer proceeds onto the stage, continuing with the intimate phone call being broadcast via wireless microphone. When she arrives at center stage, she sets her large purse onto the table—the only object on stage—and turns to face the audience. She squeals with delight at the sight of the audience and puts the phone down to speak

directly to the crowd. She announces that she is "La Profesora Mama Chocha" and welcomes us to her "seminar on how to become a tortillera" (lesbian or dyke).

For the first half of the performance, Mama Chocha leads the tortillera seminar, bantering with the audience and claiming she will teach them how to become "true tortilleras." After intermission, the solo performer arrives on stage as a new character. Similar to the previous dramatic entrance, this character bursts forth into the audience from a side door. Except this time, she is dressed in khakis, a work shirt, and a fedora, symbols of working-class Chicana butchness. She wields a three-foot-long dildo like a gun and announces herself as "Papi Duro, F.B.I." While she doesn't explain that her name translates as "Hard Daddy," she does spell out that F.B.I. stands for "Fearless Bucha Instigator." Over the course of this second act, the character is revealed to be an "old-school butch" who reminisces about the movimiento days and wants to pass on her knowledge to young "baby buchas" (butches) in the audience.

In a critical scene that questions the misogynistic tendencies associated with "old-school" or traditionally masculinist forms of butch behavior towards other women, Papi Duro struggles with being faithful to her femme lover. Papi Duro interacts with audience members and at one point accuses a butch in the audience of having an affair with Papi Duro's femme girlfriend, playing into the idea that Latina butches are over-sexed players but also breaking down the paradox of the old school butch paradigm. Anthony starts to critique the sexual double standard by way of this public "confrontation" with the audience. After she receives a package from her girlfriend

challenging Papi Duro on her own affair and threatening to break up, she realizes her girlfriend is no longer willing to put up with the double standard of the loyal femme and philandering man/butch/macho/a as a sustainable paradigm of masculinity. It is in that moment that the performance questions the viability of a butch identity that hinges on a kind of sexual prowess that disrespects femmes or disregards the traditionally closed circuit of a monogamous butch-femme ethic. Papi has expressed consciousness as a butch and as a Chicana activist and in this moment experiences a coming to consciousness around feminist and woman-to-woman solidarity.

In another critical scene, Papi Duro poses as a Mexican gardener to solicit money from rich "gringa" Beverly Hills housewives. In a structure similar to that of the first act, modeled after an instructional seminar, the character provides the audience with tips on how a butch lesbiana can pose as a Mexican gardener in order to seduce rich housewives for money. In this scene, Anthony critiques multiple mainstream U.S. cultural assumptions about Latin@s. Papi Duro expressly plays into the Latin lover stereotype in order to "raise funds for la causa":

> So, if you get selected for Operation Gaykeeper your role is not only to follow in my Papi Duro footsteps & be like a Mexican jumping bean, hopping from one bed to another leaving mujeres with a sense of their own poder, or at least with a sense of multiple orgasms. But in addition, as a 21st century FBI agent you'll be asked to do the most dreadful, taxing, mind-boggling work of any grassroots movement. Oh, yes, people, I'm asking you to fundraise!

Merging the idea of the special agent or government operative with the idea of the activist as an agent of social change, the butches chosen by Papi Duro to join her as Fearless Butch Instigators become responsible for facilitating women's self-empowerment by creating access to sexual pleasure and by raising the economic capital required to support a grassroots movement, presumably for racial, gender, and economic justice. Calling the plan "Operation Gaykeeper" invokes the history of the U.S. government's "gate-keeping" border operations. Such operations have included the rounding up and deportation of Mexicans, including Mexican Americans born in the U.S., as part of the shamelessly named "Operation Wetback" implemented by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service in 1954, during a time when the government sought to diffuse racial tensions among the working-class as well as manage the declining need for laborers by removing socially undesirable and expendable workers from the U.S. during economic recession (Gomez-Quiñonez and Maciel 40).

Referring to the effort as an "operation" also pokes fun at the myth of lesbians and gays actively seeking to "recruit" or "convert" unwitting heterosexuals into a "homosexual lifestyle." Rather than recruit straight folks to lesbian life, Papi Duro proclaims the goal of "keeping the women gay" so that they do not feel pressured to succumb to compulsory heterosexuality. This inverts the mainstream fear that lesbians threaten heterosexuals by recruiting women, and instead suggests the perhaps equally threatening notion that lesbians threaten compulsory heterosexuality by maintaining satisfaction among lesbians so that they will "stay gay." The scene also calls attention to

how Latino males who appear to be manual laborers or poor or working class because of their signature dress in khakis and work shirts are often criminalized by systemic racial profiling. Ironically, the character of Papi Duro is indeed engaging in illicit activities by seeking to extort additional money from the wealthy, land-owning white women of Beverly Hills, whose lawns she maintains.

As Papi Duro continues the "butch training" lesson for the audience, she outlines the requirements for the job. As transgressors across multiple borders, Papi Duro explains, the butch instigators will have to be discreet as well as resourceful: "But, there's a catch, esas, in order to avoid detection in your social, sexual, and geographical border crossings you're being asked to go under the covers without your modern day tools." As she says this, she pulls several dildos and a set of handcuffs out of her baggy pants pockets and throws them aside. Continuing with the lesson for the young butches, Papi Duro proceeds to describe the kinds of tools they will be allowed to use. She drags a briefcase onto the stage and starts pulling objects out of it. From the suitcase, she reveals a pair of wooden-handled hedge clippers and holds them up to the audience, declaring that the butch agent can use the shears as fingernail clippers, suggesting that short fingernails are a visible sign of butch identity or requisite for butch sexual prowess. She then asks the audience what they will do if they do not have access to sex toys:

> And think about it a real migrant worker can't be affording no $50 dildos. So, special agents, basically, if I say to you, "No dildos!" Then you say:
>
> "No problemo, Papi Duro, you said, I'm a Beverly Hills jardinero, pos

aquí tengo mi pepino. (Pulls out a cucumber.) Chingao, it's even organic!

As she pulls out the third and final item from the briefcase, Papi Duro declares triumphantly: "No store-bought lubricants?…I got my all purpose savila!" The item she holds up for display is a large aloe vera leaf, a traditional folk healing plant among Mexican Americans. She goes on to say, "Personally, I swear by my abuelita's aloe vera." Papi Duro puts these common objects into service as the butch lesbian's "tools." She takes the accoutrements associated with the gardener for hire, in this case "the Mexican gardener," and reassigns them as accessories associated with lesbian sex. By resignifying these common objects, "Mastering Sex and Tortillas" enacts a queer version of what theorist and artist Amalia Mesa-Bains calls "rasquache domesticana." According to Mesa-Bains, Chicanas in art and in everyday life have transformed domestic objects into artful expressions in order to fulfill basic needs. The rasquache domesticana is the feminine counterpart to Chicano rasquache, which refers to the resourceful art of making something from nearly nothing or using a common object for a creative or unexpected purpose, such as using gardening shears to trim one's fingernails in the absence of fingernail clippers.

Anthony queers the rasquache by making use of worker's tools for women to engage in sex with other women.[11] By noting that Chicana lesbianas have resorted to

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[11] For a discussion of the rasquache as a working-class form of art and survival, see Tomás Ybarra Frausto's "Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility" in *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965-1985*,

various tactics of survival in order to find each other and engage in sexual liaisons, Anthony deploys the cultural concept of rasquachismo for the express purpose of making lesbian and queer desire and pleasure possible. Thus, Anthony mobilizes an erotics of power, playing with the stigmas attached to Mexican gardeners as well as to cross-racial, same-sex desire. In this way, Anthony appeals to the audience's sympathy by claiming to be working for a noble cause, "la causa," that of racial equity and social justice for Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and Latin@s.

Through the themes of fidelity to butch-femme structures of desire and the role of lesbianas in the civil rights movements, Anthony emphasizes the pivotal place of Chicana butches in developing queer communities within and across racial bounds. Anthony's nuanced critique and reworking of Chicana butchness places a value on butch expression within Chicana lesbian or queer contexts and positions the butch as a potentially powerful and threatening figure to a racist, heterosexist status quo. As a "role model" for the

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edited by Richard Griswold del Castillo, Teresa McKenna, and Yvonne Yarbro Bejarano (Los Angeles: Wight Art Gallery, UCLA, 1991). Ybarra Frausto locates the rasquache aesthetic as a form of Mexican American vernacular expression, emphasizing the use of common objects and resources to express an attitude of cultural strength and survival. Amalia Mesa-Bains critiques Ybarra Frausto's definition of what constitutes the rasquache, citing it as unnecessarily masculinist. She looks to the "domestic" in order consider feminine forms of rasquachismo. However, because Mesa-Bains, offers only female artists as examples of those who can contribute to this feminine domestic form of rasquachismo, I contend that her definition is limiting as well, failing to take into account artists who queer the concept of rasquachismo as a gendered practice.

aspiring butches in the audience, the character of Papi Duro also becomes a community mentor intent on imparting sexual knowledge. As such, Anthony performs a sex-positive, risque, unapologetically irreverent approach to passing on Chicana lesbiana cultural knowledge. Anthony's performance pays tribute to old-school Chicana butches who were involved in the Chicano Movement and also asserts that the contemporary Chicana butch must consciously choose which aspects of traditional Chicana butch identity to sustain and which to shed. Anthony effectively embodies the place of butch in the larger Chican@ movement, with Papi Duro arguing for a movement of Chicana butch identity beyond the historical or nostalgic.

Like Rocky Gamez and Adelina Anthony, the Butchlalis of Panochtitlan construct complex renderings of the Chicana butch. The Butchlalis of Panochtitlan are a performance troupe comprised of three core members: Raquel Gutierrez, Mari Garcia, and Claudia Rodriguez. Some of their shows have included a fourth member or guest performer. The group's name riffs on Tenochtitlan, now Mexico City, built on the ancient Aztec capital and the site of the promised land of the Aztecs upon their departure from the legendary homeland of Aztlán. Chicano-izing the sacred city's name, the Butchlalis replace the first part of the word “tenochca” (another term for Mexica or Aztec peoples) with “panocha,” considered vulgar Mexican/Chicano slang for vagina. Thus, the Butchlalis declare themselves to be of the holy capital of pussylandia.

In “The Barber of East L.A." (see Figure 6), the Butchlalis locate themselves not only in the imagined sacred land of Panochtitlan but also in the city of Los Angeles,

particularly in East L.A., in its ongoing struggles against gentrification. A staged production of "The Barber of East L.A." played in 2009 at the Jumpstart Theater in San Antonio and was directed by Luis Alfaro, known for his queer solo performance. It was a sold-out show, with a large contingency from ALLGO's Austin-based queer community joining the San Antonio crowd. The spare stage was set with a long table lined with mannequin heads wearing wigs of various styles and colors.

When the lights go up on stage, standing front and center are three Latina butches wearing crisp white guayaberas, blue jeans, and black dress shoes. The bucha in the center has a hairstyle cresting in front to suggest a slight pompadour. The troupe opens the first act like a doo-wop vocal group, dressed alike and moving in unison. Together they chant their opening rhyme:

> "There's a butch in every barrio
> There's a butch in every 'hood
> Every barrio has its macha
> Not every barrio treats her good"

The terms "barrio" and "'hood" establish a place that looms somewhere between the specific (given the naming of East L.A. in the play's title) and the universal, as the signifier "barrio" can refer to any neighborhood with a significant Latin@ presence.

Figure 6. Butchlalis banner promoting their show *The Barber of East L.A.*

The use of "butch" and "macha" signal not just a Chican@ or Latin@ framework but also a working-class one, as "macha" tends to be used as a slang term, derived from marimacho or marimacha. The first three lines claim the butch's ubiquitous presence across barrios, while the final line suggests that the macha/butch may be subject to mistreatment or harassment and locates her as an Other within a Chican@/Latin@ neighborhood community. While typically the neighborhood or barrio serves as the place

where Chican@s make sense to themselves and each other away from a hostile or indifferent dominant culture, the bucha does not always receive such understanding.

Chonch Fonseca, the central protagonist, is described in the script as being "35, Butch Dyke, Latina." In a crucial scene, Chonch explains how she was named by an older Chicana/Latina butch in her neighborhood. Chonch recalls being a young kid looking out the window of a multi-story apartment building onto the street and being mesmerized by the sight of an older butch woman and the confident way she stood on the street corner with her girlfriend. She identifies the confusing contradictions of gender expressions embodied by the elder butch, known in the barrio as a woman called Juana Chingas:

> I looked out the window and I see… her.
>
> Ella. La mas firme de todas.
>
> A bulldagger leaning against the bus stop, doing it like she does it every day.
>
> Sabia.
>
> That's where I wanted to live, in her body.
>
> Her broad shoulders fill out the bright blue Pendleton - it makes her look like a prince - she wears her pantalones caquis with a killer crease.
>
> But it's her HAIR, that does me in! Es puro cholo pompadour!
>
> Elvis, Ritchie Valens and Buddy Holly with hips, tits, lips and power.

When the two women on the street corner begin to kiss each other, the young girl watching the scene from the window above the street is so awestruck by what she sees that she blurts out a nonsensical sound: "Choooonch." The older butch Latina on the street looks up to see who is yelling out the window. When the older butch sees the young masculine-looking girl in the window, she calls her by the sound she yelled: "Chonch." The young protagonist says: "When Juana Chingas hears that come out of my mouth, she laughs real cool and tosses her head back to see who the fuck this traviesa is." Juana Chingas responds with a colloquial greeting akin to "What's up, Chonch?" by saying "Quihubole, Chonch?" Proudly, Chonch recalls of that moment: "She gave me my name."

By saying "She gave me my name," Chonch recognizes the significance of the queer rite of passage she has experienced. In witnessing the desire expressed between two female Latina lovers, one butch and one femme, Chonch has no language to describe the specific form of desire she sees, but she knows it surprises and moves her. The sound she utters becomes an exchange between her and the older butch woman she wants to be like, and together they construct a queer language that names the young butch and the confusing intensity of her gendered desire.

In this moment of naming, the young butch is so startled by her own identification with the older butch that she does not seem to acknowledge the presence of the older femme. In *Queering Mestizaje*, Alicia Arrizón explains the troupe's performative focus on Latina butchness, suggesting that "the enactment of masculinity, as understood by the

BdP ensemble, is not a rejection of femininity but a performance of female masculinities that are often ignored by, or misunderstood in, our society" (163). In centering the ignored or misunderstood Chicana butch as the protagonist of this narrative, however, the performance risks marginalizing its representation of Chicana femme identity. Although femme characters are present in the play, they seem to be relegated to being the sexual objects of the butches. Unike Adelina Anthony's deft portrayal of Chicana butch, the Butchlalis in this particular performance do not offer a critique of femme objectification or the limits of masculinity.

Chonch grows up to become fascinated with butch hairstyles and decides to become a butch barber. As part of her commitment to serving not just her queer community but also the working-class Chican@s and Latin@s of her East L.A. barrio, Chonch opens her own barber shop after graduating from beauty school. As she struggles to build a modest small business, she also struggles with whether to serve as a role model for the neighborhood's queer kids. On the one hand, Chonch seeks to queer her barrio by being a highly visible butch barber who offers traditionally masculine haircuts for women. On the other hand, she worries that her traditional notion of Chicana butch will not provide the younger butches with adequate queer knowledge to survive in a homophobic world, especially in the rough barrio where she must negotiate her complex relationship between her Chicanidad and her queerness.

Arlene Stein, in *Shameless: Sexual Dissidence in American Culture* (2006), claims that "Like ethnic communities, lesbian/gay boundaries, identities, and cultures are

negotiated, defined, and produced" (14). Rather than viewing the cultural formations of ethnic communities and lesbian/gay communities as parallel, the queer Chicana cultural and artistic producers in this chapter inspire a revision of Stein's statement to read something like the following: *In* ethnic communities, lesbian/gay boundaries, identities, and cultures are negotiated, defined, and produced with relation to race and class, and in the process, they contribute to reshaping those communities.

The boundaries and definitions of Chicana butch in the representations I examine in this chapter are indeed culturally distinct from other cultural productions of dominative, white female masculinity. In *The Drag King Book*, in the chapter devoted to "Class, Race, and Masculinity: The Superfly, the Macdaddy, and the Rapper," Del Lagrace Volcano and Jack Halberstam acknowledge the pervasiveness and ranges of butch-femme visible in women of color communities:

> Interestingly, in predominantly women-of-color queer spaces, in New York at least, many of the women participate in elaborate and creative versions of butch-femme style, while the more white spaces favor a kind of androgynous or alternative aesthetic (piercings and tattoos). Many of the Drag Kings we interviewed in New York attested to a kind of racialized separation of spheres. Since butch-femme already exists within some of the women-of-color spaces as a noticeable style, one might expect that these clubs would produce more Drag King culture. This was not true.

In attempting to find a connection between butch-femme and drag king culture among women of color queer spaces, Halberstam and Volcano fail to recognize the need to disarticulate drag king as a public performative aesthetic style from butch-femme as an always already available gender orientation for queer women of color. Their observation that "butch-femme already exists" for women of color aligns with my assertion that butch-femme among Chicanas, especially working-class Chicanas, did not necessarily experience the same disappearance or backlash as it did among white lesbians in urban centers. Also, the butch-femme "style" Halberstam and Volcano note in women of color queer communities differs substantively from the public performance of female masculinity in drag kinging.

Thinking of Chicana butch as a gender orientation, that is, not just as a gender and/or sexuality identity, which suggests a fixedness, or as gender expression, which can be misread as being too fluid—can provide a productive contextualization of Chicana butch. Sara Ahmed, in *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006), echoing Judith Butler, suggests that butch and femme tend to be misread as false copies that mimic heterosexuality because one must also consider the orientation of individuals to their objects of desire. I think Ahmed's use of "orientation" helps us make sense of how Chicana butches orient themselves not just in terms of their sexual objects of desire but also in terms of their racial/ethnic filiations and affiliations. I contend that the cultural representations of Chicana butchness discussed in this chapter call for an understanding of Chicana butch as not just about a fixed identity or a fluidity of

expression, but about a particular gender orientation as it intersects with sexual orientation.

Through my readings of Gamez's, Anthony's, and the Butchlalis' cultural productions, I offer a re-orienting of Chicana butch as a racialized gender orientation, and certainly much more than a fixed identity or adopted style. Adelina Anthony's work serves as an "orientation" for baby butches. Her characters orient new butch agents on how to be butch. Anthony is also performing the cultural work of political orientation, providing young Chicanas with a history of the Chicano Movement and the significant role that Chicana lesbian feminists played in organizing for the movement. Anthony's butch orientation calls for an understanding that Chicana butches have a history of serving Chican@ community. Gamez's work is oriented to place, in this case South Texas, and to making sense of how the Chicana butch struggles to find a place for herself within Chican@ community. The butch in "The Barber of East L.A." is also very oriented to place. For her, East L.A. provides a sense of specific place or home that is threatened by gentrification and by its own potentially self-destructive responses to queerness.

In Carol Queen's account of how she came into her femme identity, she recalls the 1970s as devoid of butch-femme culture: "In the seventies, when I came out into the dyke community, butch was dead and androgyny was practically an imperative" (153). She further characterizes the '70s as "that decade of butchness diluted and femme reviled" (155). In a 1992 article in the *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Lillian Faderman

chimes in on this popular refrain that butch-femme had fallen away and then re-emerged. Faderman's article, "The Return of Butch and Femme: A Phenomenon in Lesbian Sexuality of the 1980s and 1990s," claims that the figure of the butch reappeared in lesbian life and public discourse after an absence of some years and uses the term "neo-butch" to capture this apparent resurgence. Faderman and Queen's accounts, like Nestle's and Stein's, echo the dominant narrative of white middle-class lesbian history in the late twentieth century. The texts I discuss in this chapter suggest that for Chicanas and queer working-class communities of color, the same kind of chronologies or paradigms of lesbian gender and butch-femme cannot be assumed.

While being butch and/or femme may have indeed fallen in and out of favor in some circles for varying reasons of sexual politics, many Chicana lesbian literary and cultural productions indicate an alternative history of what butch-femme means and can mean. When we look to Chicana cultural productions, a narrative of butch-femme beyond Faderman's, or Halberstam and Volcano's, version comes into view. For Chicanas, butch-femme is not a nueva onda, nor is it a trendy (or passe) movida, but rather it has been a sustained way of being lesbian or queer within a predominantly working-class Chican@ context. The notion that butch-femme ever left the building in the first place is a white lesbian narrative that can exclude as well as unconsciously dismiss how butch-femme may be at work in various working-class and poor queer communities of color, particularly in places distanced from the urban and suburban epicenters of lesbian academic conversations.

Faderman attributes what she calls neo-butch to a reaction against 1970s lesbian feminism and also a sense of adventure, both of which assume a monolithic middle-class lesbian frame:

> Although a few women who identified as butch or femme in the 1980s (or at present) [1992] did so with the same deadly seriousness that characterized the women of the 1950s, many others did it out of a sense of adventure, a historical curiosity, a longing to push at the limits. For them neo-butch/ femme roles and relationships often maintain the lessons of feminism that lesbians learned from the 1970s. They are more subtle, complex, flexible. There are few contemporary butches who would entertain the notion that they are men trapped in women's bodies. For these reasons, the meaning of butch and femme over the past decade was very different from what it had been thirty or forty years earlier."

There is, to be sure, a certain social mobility and public expression of gender identity and public debate around lesbian and queer assumed in Faderman's argument. The "seriousness" that Faderman acknowledges, yet seems to dismiss, fails to recognize the working-class butch-femme history where daily survival may have been and continued to be rather serious business. Faderman's account of butch-femme misses the mark for the Chicana butch texts, in which Chicana femmes and butches, even in humorous moments, are taken rather seriously. I hope my own textual analyses demonstrate that we cannot simply use dominative frames like Faderman's piece as a lens to read texts like the

working-class Chicana butch literature of Rocky Gamez. It would be too easy to assume Rocky Gamez's piece as an example, proof of Faderman's argument, that there has been a resurgence toward butch-femme in the 1980s and 90s.

The story of lesbian gender becomes a dominant narrative that goes from butch-femme to androgyny to reclaiming butch-femme, a neo-butch era. But if we resist imposing this white lesbian paradigm onto queer brown experience and instead allow queer brown texts and lives to theorize themselves, then we see butchness for some Chicana lesbians is not about riding a stylistic, aesthetic, or political trend. So when contemporary conversations turn to talk about "butch flight" or "all the butches" choosing to become FTM transgenders, or when people ask where all the butches have gone, perhaps they need look no further than Rocky Gamez's Rio Grande Valley, the Butchlalis' "East Los," or any working-class barrio where, undoubtedly, buchas, chingónas, and marimachas continue to carve out queer spaces for loving and living as butch Chicanas.

In the next chapter, concentrating on contemporary novelist Felicia Luna Lemus, I show how queerly gendered lesbians become illegible as Chicana to other Chican@s. Like Chicana butchness, genderqueerness by way of ambiguity or illegibility, because of its unreadability, poses a bigger threat to an imagined Chicano consciousness than same-sex or lesbian desire. In Lemus's queer Chican@ worlds, unreadable genders and transgenders disrupt the Chican@ butch-femme binary and trouble fixed ideas of queer Chican@ genders.

Illegible Genders in the Fiction of Felicia Luna Lemus

> The complex of melancholia behaves like an open wound, drawing to itself cathectic energies—which in the transference neuroses we have called 'anticathexes'—from all direction, and emptying the ego until it is totally impoverished.
>
> —Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" (1915)

> The U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* [is an open wound] where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture.
>
> —Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987)

In the 1991 essay "Chicana Lesbians: Fear and Loathing in the Chicano Community," in *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About*, Carla Trujillo contends that Chican@s have historically perceived lesbians as threats. This lament has been widely expressed by Trujillo's literary peers, Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, and 1980s borderlands generation authors who struggled with whether their lesbian identity was at odds with their ethnic identity. Moraga's *Loving in the War Years: lo que nunca pasó por sus labios* (1983) engages the struggles of being a mixed-race,

light-skinned Chicana, a lesbian, and a feminist. Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) grapples with historical erasure and recovery of Chicana experience, sexual violence against women, and forming feminist alliances across racial and ethnic differences. Borderlands generation texts were predominantly concerned with two questions—what it means to be a Chicana lesbian among Chican@s and what it means to be a woman of color feminist among white feminists.

Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* grapples with historical erasure and recovery of Chicana experience, sexual violence against women, and forming feminist alliances across racial and ethnic differences. Moraga's *Loving in the War Years* engages the struggles of being a mixed-race, light-skinned Chicana, a lesbian, and a feminist. These representative borderlands generation texts are predominately concerned with what it means to be a Chicana lesbian disowned by Chican@s and what it means to be a woman of color feminist unseen by white feminists.

For both Anzaldúa and Moraga, the lesbian in the borderlands has no home and must make her own psychic and cultural home out of the remains of her loss and out of what Anzaldúa refers to as her "own feminist architecture." In the final passage of Cherríe Moraga's mixed-genre text, *Loving in the War Years*—a collection of essays, poems, and vignettes—the butch Chicana lesbian narrator says: "En el sueño mi amor pregunta 'Dónde está tu río?' And I point to the middle of my chest" (145). When her lover asks her in a dream, "Where is your river?" and the lesbiana points to the middle of her chest, to her body's core or her corazón, she responds in a similar vein as the narrator

of Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* faced with a similar question: Where is your border, where is your home/land? Anzaldúa's voice of the new mestiza responds that her home is "a vague and undetermined place." "Wherever I go," she says, "I carry home on my back" (43).

Chicana lesbian texts of the post-borderlands, however, suggest that it is not lesbianism, same-sex desire, or even sexuality in general, but instead genderqueerness that poses greater challenges to the coherence of Chican@ community and a shared Chican@ imaginary. Genderqueerness, because of its unreadability, ultimately poses a bigger threat to a Chican@ imaginary than same-sex desire. This shift in a Chicana lesbian feminist consciousness to privilege genderqueerness over queer sexuality is evident in the works of contemporary queer Chicana novelist Felicia Luna Lemus. Lemus's fiction signals a shift away from a borderlands consciousness that saw same-sex desire as the ultimate cultural taboo. While Lemus's texts do share some borderlands concerns in that they continue the borderlands project of imagining a place for lesbians and queers in Chican@ community, they also extend this cultural work by writing genderqueerness or non-normative genders into the picture.

In Lemus's work, it is not just sexuality but genderqueerness that becomes the next borderlands of Chican@ identity to be crossed, entered, negotiated, constructed, interrogated, and imagined. In Lemus's first novel, *Trace Elements of Random Tea Parties*, published by Seal Press in 2003, a Chicana dyke named Leti navigates adventures in love and family while being haunted by Weeping Woman, la Llorona of

Mexican folk legend. Lemus's second novel, *Like Son*, published by Akashic Books in 2007, tells the story of Frank, born Francisca, who negotiates similar adventures in love and family as a female-to-male transgendered person. Both of Lemus's narratives explore how non-normative genders push the boundaries of sexuality beyond a straight/queer binary to include questions of gender expression.

Lemus's books have not yet received much critical attention in mainstream presses or much discussion in scholarly publications. Lemus's popularity, however, can be gleaned from her online presence and fan following on social networking websites such as MySpace and Facebook, where her readers have posted comments in support of her work.

Lemus's fiction considers the possibilities and binds of genderqueerness for Chicanas and opens up a space for talking about the shifting and complex dynamics between race and ethnicity and gender and sexuality in ways not necessarily taken up by many of her literary Chicana predecessors.

Lemus's fiction complicates the issues of gender identity, gender expression, and gender variance or genderqueerness, recognizing a range of what queer theorist Jack Halberstam calls "female masculinities" and paying particular attention to how her character's female masculinities negotiate Chicanidad or Chican@ identity. Lemus's texts are not concerned with naming or locating themselves within a geopolitical, ethnic, psychological, or spiritual borderlands, as were Chicana lesbian texts of the 1980s and '90s. Characters in Lemus's novels take a borderlands identity as a given, assumed or

unquestioned, amounting to a mainstreamed, acceptable otherness. They then build multiple layers of identity, constructing hybrid subjectivities that cannot be fully located, especially by other Chican@s.

While much Chican@ literature has explored the oppositional dynamics of Chicano versus Anglo, citizen versus immigrant-as-foreigner, working versus middle and owning class, female versus male, queer versus straight, Lemus adds to the matrices of identity and power by exploring what it means to be genderqueer versus normative as well as punkera/punk versus mainstream. Lemus's fiction considers the possibilities and binds of genderqueerness for Chican@s. Her work suggests that genderqueerness disrupts a sense of unified cultural wholeness in the Chican@ imaginary. But Lemus's work is not just about rupture; it is also about reclamation and recovery in that for Lemus's characters genderqueerness allows for reclaiming lost history and coming to terms with a collective Chican@ sense of lost wholeness.

Many of the Chicana lesbian anthologies and fictional works prior to Lemus's use the term "lesbian." Lemus, however, eschews the label "lesbian" altogether and tends to use "dyke" and "queer" interchangeably in her novels. Lemus's usage reflects a historical shift away from "lesbian" and "gay" identities toward "queer" as a more common signifier. While Lemus does not use terms such as genderqueer, transsexual, or transgendered, her work nonetheless takes up these issues and identities as inherently bound up in queer Chican@ experience.

In the introduction to the 2002 anthology *GenderQueer: Voices from Beyond the*

Sexual Binary, edited by Joan Nestle, Clare Howell, and Riki Wilchins, co-editor Riki Wilchins offers a definition of genderqueerness that encompasses sex, gender, and sexuality: "In a society where femininity is feared and loathed, all women are genderqueer. In a culture where masculinity is defined by having sex with women and femininity by having sex with men, all gay people are gender queers" (12). Wilchins also notes that "…whenever gender is mentioned, it is inevitably written down—and too often written off—as only transgender…" (15). Drawing on Wilchins's generalized definition, I am using "genderqueer" to denote gender variant identities and expressions that seek to disrupt or transcend the female/male gender binary or to resist gender norms.

In an interview of the author conducted by Michelle Tea, Lemus describes her project of representing and imagining genderqueer Chicanas. Tea says that when she first read Lemus's novel, she was confused by all of the gender fluidity. In the novel, the protagonist Leti does not assume or adopt either a feminine or masculine gender expression and stick with it as though it were a fixed identity. Lemus offers that representing gender fluidity "was important to me also in terms of being Chicana" (*Believer Book of Writers Talking to Writers* 178). Lemus goes on to say, "I don't know many androgynous Chicanas or anyone who plays that line quite like I see people of different ethnicities play it. People who are still very much in touch with their culture, who aren't more assimilated, they still play by the kind of old school rules of butch/femme. And I respect that. There's something about it culturally that works." Notably, Lemus relegates butch-femme to the past, where "old school rules" are at work.

Lemus also associates butch-femme in Chicana culture with the lack of assimilation into mainstream white culture. The old school rules of butch-femme, then, become for Lemus markers of an ethnic authenticity, a sense of being "in touch" with one's culture. This positions butch-femme as traditional in Chican@ culture, which potentially opens a way for anything outside the butch-femme paradigm to seem more assimilated, and hence, less Chican@.

Leti's gender fluidity challenges gender norms among Chicanas, queer and straight. Tea's confusion about the text speaks to how the narrative enacts gender fluidity by disrupting any expectations or assumptions of a gender binary. This shifting terrain of gender expressions makes the main character's gender unpredictable and unreadable.

In her fiction, Lemus explores what happens for Chicanas outside of the butch-femme binary. Lemus's challenge of the Chicana butch-femme binary emphasizes how butch-femme has become a marked point of reference for Chicana lesbians. Indeed, Moraga's autobiographical writings, particularly *Loving in the War Years*, contributed to the construction of butch-femme as a prevalent form of gender identities among Chicana lesbians. Moraga's literary persona as a Chicana butch looms large among the representative body of Chicana lesbian literature. Given such a literary legacy, Lemus's texts can be read as laments as well as celebratory representations of the (im)possibility of genderqueerness beyond butch-femme in Chicanidad. The unreadability of gendered subjects in Lemus's novels makes certain kinds of genderqueerness more out of place in Chican@ culture than other kinds of lesbian genders. By focusing on versions of

genderqueerness that do *not* work culturally, Lemus exposes how the cultural signs and systems that work and do not work get read, misread, or not read according to Chican@ understandings of normative genders.

If butch-femme, as Lemus claims, "works" culturally, it is because it is to some extent accepted, or acceptable, in Chican@ culture. Lemus's comment reveals how butch-femme can be viewed as homonormative among queers yet heteronormative within the context of traditional Chican@ culture. But this acceptability of butch-femme can be at the expense of allowing other gender identities or expressions to flourish; butch-femme can, unfortunately, render other forms of genderqueerness unreadable or unallowable. The idea that butch-femme entirely "works" in Chican@ culture breaks down in Lemus's novels, however, in that the butch or genderqueer lesbians are rejected by or cast out of their families. How does butch-femme "work" if, in Lemus's texts, the butch or masculine woman or genderqueer is cast out of Chican@ family and community? How does butch-femme "work," if the butch part of the equation is not accepted on its own? There is an elision that occurs culturally between the lesbian frame of reference and a genderqueerness frame of reference. Butch-Femme is a lesbian gender system that is recognizable within a Chican@ context either because of its assumed resemblance to heterosexual gender paradigms or perhaps because of lesbian cultural work to assert its meaning. But a butch alone, without being coupled with or associated as paired with a femme, is typically read as genderqueer before she is read as a lesbian or dyke. That is, a Chicana butch gets read as gender variant before she gets read as a lesbian. Any

genderqueerness is suspect or rejectable because it is presumed unacceptable and unreadable. Lemus's genderqueer protagonists are unreadable as either femme or butch, the only readable or discernible categories of gender expression deemed allowable for Chicana lesbians. And even within the tolerated binary of butch-femme, the feminine is considered socially acceptable, excluding the masculine woman, the butch, from what is allowed to be seen or expressed. Lemus's novels incisively get at the reality yet impossibility of female masculinity among queer Chicanas.

The novel *Trace Elements of Random Tea Parties* privileges a working-class, genderqueer Chicana dyke subjectivity, attempting to write this subject into an empowered position in the Chican@ imaginary. Yet, the text ultimately renders this Chicana dyke subject *unreadable* by mainstream Chican@s, leaving her with alliances outside Chican@ culture but without a Chican@ community. This move to position the genderqueer Chicana as liberated only outside of Chicano community addresses the problematic of genderqueer subjectivity in relation to Chicanidad.

The text uses two queer Chicana characters, Leti and Edith, to show how Chicana lesbians negotiate aspects of their identity and can make radically different choices around them. Leti, as the central figure in the text, becomes the focal point for the development of a particular kind of Chicana dyke identity deemed authentic; Edith's Chicana lesbian identity becomes discounted around the issue of class. Identity in this text is highly performative and centers around shared sexuality, gender expression, and class in ways that may privilege those aspects of identity *over* ethnicity, calling into

question the notion that one's ethnicity is always central to one's identity. Furthermore, Lemus's narrative configures Chicana dyke identity as so extremely performative and fluid as to become constantly in transition, and hence, indefinable.

Leti is a college-educated Chicana lesbian with a working-class background. Leti does not fret over what it means to be a Chicana. And once her character "comes out" as a lesbian early on in the novel, she does not have any notable identity struggles over her sexuality. It is Leti's genderqueerness that becomes the central aspect of her character's identity struggles. Leti, and other characters in the novel, push at the boundaries of traditional gender expression. Leti plays with gender expression by mixing feminine and masculine clothing and by referring to herself alternately as dyke, boy, boy-girl, femme, or princess. In one moment, Leti is wearing pearls and insists on calling herself "princess." Later, she dresses herself in what she refers to as "boy" clothes.

In the narrative, Leti and her friends play with gender. This may involve dressing masculine or feminine, or being androgynous, or combining these attributes. They move seemingly randomly along a gender expression continuum, engaging in what critic Jack Halberstam describes in *Female Masculinity* as "layering," the practice of donning a layer of outer attire that signifies one's so-called "opposite" gender. Drag performers, for example, often engage in layering that does not try to fully "hide" the biological gender of the body underneath. According to Halberstram, one who engages in this type of gender play through dress does not hide but instead reveals—by allowing all of the layers to show at once, making a genderqueer performance a way of exposing the ludicrous

limitations of a binaristic gender system.

For Leti, this type of gender play becomes an integral part of how she moves through her queer world. Before going out to Crystal's, her favorite dyke bar, she carefully chooses her attire, pointing out that she wears her pearl choker "especially if [she] was going to Crystal's" (56). Leti indeed engages in this type of "layering" gender play and seems to revel in queering her gender not just by occasionally dressing masculine but also by mixing elements of masculine and feminine dress, causing all of her layers of gender expression to show at once.

By situating Leti as the central figure in the text, Lemus privileges a working-class, genderqueer Chicana dyke subjectivity in a way that few Chicana texts have attempted. These intersecting identity issues have been theorized by Anzaldúa and Moraga, for instance, but they have not, for the most part, been addressed in very many Chicana novels. What Lemus does with this subjectivity, however, raises a host of questions about how queerness figures into Chican@ identity, particularly in terms of how genderqueer is situated as opposed to, or outside the boundaries of, Chicanidad.

Leti's grandmother (Nana) becomes a significant player in Leti's identity struggle. Significantly, it is around gender expression—not sexuality—that their relationship becomes threatened. Nana and Leti do not explicitly discuss Leti's sexuality, her dyke identity, or her desire for other women. Throughout the text, Leti has a series of girlfriends but she never has a "coming out" moment in which she declares her sexuality to Nana, who is her mother figure. This is a curious absence in a lesbian novel but

perhaps speaks to the silence that pervades many Chican@ families around issues of sexuality, particularly lesbianism. Leti does not go through a process in which she is wracked with indecision about whether she is a lesbian or not; she realizes her lesbian identity in college without so much as a second thought. Thus, she does not seem to have an identity crisis over her sexuality, and she does not seem to be faced with any desire to announce her newfound sexual identity to Nana. Whether Nana makes any assumptions about Leti's sexuality is never hinted at in the text, and so we can presume that this was either a site of silence or simply a non-issue.

What does become an issue, however, is Leti's gender performance. When her Nana visits her on Mother's Day, Leti dons masculine attire for the occasion. She carefully irons one of her "grown-up dress shirts," a "new skinny navy blue tie," and a pair of "new dark brown slacks" (166). This is radically different than how she has dressed before. Although she has occasionally chosen a single marker of masculinity to accent her attire, such as an ex-lover's pair of "Italian zippered boots" (43), she is typically depicted as feminine, wearing short dresses, her favorite pearl choker, and on one occasion, a cat suit. Yet, she claims to want to "get dressed proper for Nana" (165), and likens herself to a chemistry "experiment."

Leti also radically alters her hairstyle for the occasion, losing her "sharp-edged bob hairdo" (typically coded as feminine), claiming it "dragged [her] down into a funk and put [her] in tears," despite the fact that we have not been shown any such evidence of her unhappiness with her previous appearance. She opts for a "cropped barbershop

clean-cut boy haircut." She changes her appearance in this manner, "hoping that the elements would meld without too harsh an explosion" (165). Thus, she expects some type of "explosion" from Nana's reaction but hopes only that it will not be too harsh.

When Nana arrives at Leti's house and sees her dressed in a manly manner, Nana reacts strongly to her gender expression by exclaiming, "Dear Mother of God. Is that a boy or a girl?" Nana's reaction is especially significant because she does not say that Leti looks like a boy or man; she appears to not understand which sex or gender is being presented. Additionally, she does not refer to Leti by name or speak directly to her; she uses the word "that" as though Leti is not a person but an indecipherable object. Thus, Nana makes it clear that it is not Leti's choice to express a "female masculinity" that is a problem. It is the ambiguity of her gender performance that is not readable or tolerated.

In the grandmother's reaction, she makes an appeal to the Virgin Mary ("Mother of God"), typically enacted when one is making a request in prayer. Opening such an appeal with "Dear," however, increases the urgency, making the utterance either a direct appeal to the Virgin Mary or an epithet, doubly blasphemous in Chican@ Catholic culture because it curses both the holy figure and the sacred figure of the mother.

The use of the word "that," because it is a generic, not a gendered pronoun, emphasizes the volatility associated with upsetting traditional gender categories. Leti, here, is spoken about as an object, unidentifiable in terms of specific gender. The generic "that" also distances the two subjects from each other (that over there versus me here). In the absence of a gendered pronoun, the grandmother calls attention to the ubiquitousness

of fixed ideas of gender; the grandmother has only the traditional gender binary to understand Leti: that Leti must be either a boy or a girl. The question is also infantilizing; the grandmother does not ask whether Leti is a man or a woman but asks instead whether Leti is a boy or a girl. She also does not speak directly to Leti, instead calling on her higher spiritual power to explain "that" which she sees before her.

While we can interpret the grandmother's reaction as shock, disgust, or dismay at the loss of the possibility of gender normativity, we can also see it simply as a moment of utter confusion. In that moment of her exclamation, the grandmother fails (whether feigning or not) to read Leti because Leti does not register clearly as either female or male. This moment of un-readability according to the traditional gender binary is also a disavowal, a distancing, and ultimately a de-humanizing move that leaves Leti's very personhood in doubt.

That Nana does not ever have such an outburst around Leti's sexuality suggests that silence or denial is the mode of operating around that issue. Leti does not ever specifically "come out" (used here to describe a discrete declarative event rather than a long-term process) to her grandmother, who serves as Leti's connection to Chicana culture. However, this scene of unreadable gender performance is a type of coming out, one of genderqueerness, and Nana essentially rejects her. Although we may sympathize with Leti's rejection during her coming-out moment, her actions call into question her choice to force the issue in this manner.

After this scene in which the grandmother is shocked by Leti's masculine gender

expression, the grandmother suddenly dies. It is as though Leti's gender ambiguity—her unreadability—has killed her Mexican grandmother. Thus, the novel engages in what I call the "killing-the-Mexican-syndrome," in which the feminist protagonist can live fully only once the text kills off her Mexican past. Leti also breaks off her relationship with Edith, the other Chicana lesbian in the novel, because she learns that Edith is from an economically privileged background. This severs Leti's only other connection to her Chican@ community.

Leti forms a friendship with a fellow genderqueer, working-class white dyke, Nolan. In the novel's final scene, Leti and Nolan, Chicana dyke and white dyke, sit together, while Leti waxes nostalgic about stories Nana has shared with her of her Mexican heritage. In the end Leti is left with two things: her Chicana stories and her alliance with Nolan. On the one hand, Leti's alliance with Nolan can be seen as transformative because it crosses ethnic borders, even as it leaves the Chicana without her Chicana community. To read this ending, one might be tempted to look to Anzaldúa's borderlands theory to provide a framework for reading the racialized genderqueer Chicana and her predicament around gender, sexuality, class, race, and nation. In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa argues that the Chicana lesbian has no race or nation (102). And Lemus's novel seems to demonstrate this, in that if Leti wants to be a genderqueer queer person, she can do so only after escaping the boundaries of Chican@ family and community. But in Anzaldúa's vision of the new mestiza, the Chicana lesbian (and Chicana in general) emerges from the crucible that is the borderlands with a

transcendent consciousness and radicalized politic organized around social activism. In Lemus's narrative, the Chicana lesbian is without a nation. She is neither envisioned back into her Chican@ nation nor envisioned as altering that nation so that it will accept her. Leti's consciousness is unclear, her political intent is unclear, her gender is unclear, and her choices are unclear.

In portraying transformative options for queer Chicanas, Lemus may instead tread on dangerous ground here, suggesting that there is always a forced choice—between Chican@ community and queer community—for Chicanas who, like Gloria Anzaldúa, "choose" to be queer. Within the logic of Lemus's fictional framework of queer Chicana experience, Chicana dykes who align themselves with white dykes at the expense of their Chican@ communities may be left with nothing more than trace elements of Chicanidad. But must one physically move out of a Chican@ borderlands in order to live in a gender-bending borderlands? Where, then, does queerness leave a Chicana if her connection to Chicanidad is rooted only in memory and story but no other actual Chican@s?

The fluidity of gender is also explored via the fluidity of language in the novel. Lemus's peculiar use of repetitive descriptions evokes a poetic device employed by the Mexica, or ancient Aztecs. In Nahau poetry, renaming through repetition is common, as is the use of compound words and phrases, such as in the term "xochicuicatl" which translates to the compound "flower-song" or "flor y canto" or, in a poem, referring to a hummingbird as "humming-bird, the emerald trembler" (see Karl Taub, Miguel Leon-Portilla, Rafael Perez-Torres). This repetition for emphasis is also a poetic strategy used

by seventeenth century Mexican poet Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, known for her outspoken feminist critiques of Mexican social and religious institutions. In *Chicano Poetics: Heterotexts and Hybridities*, Alfred Arteaga associates Sor Juana's use of inverted repetitive phrases as a gendered chiasmus, a rhetorical device illustrative of the feminist resistance expressed in her work. In the case of Lemus, the redundant phrases occasionally use a part to describe a whole in the form of a metonymy or synecdoche but are more often simply descriptive or stylistic excess for effect. For example, when Leti and her friends get thrown out of a San Francisco gay men's bar because it is for gay men only, Leti describes the dive they wind up at as "an old movie-house balcony with seats so sunken-down broken-springs that we might as well have sat on the sticky floor" (104). Then when they find a lively dyke venue, Leti describes the scene with, "[t]he place was wall-to-wall delicious dykes and good ambience" (104), where she and her lover "messed around in a curtained caboose seat" while being observed by "[t]wo tired corporate-tower types who were totally out of place in the tough vibe of the bar" (104).

The repetitive, tiered descriptions align with the conversational tone of the novel. For example, the narrator engages in many asides, such as claiming that every word of the story is true or asking the reader not to laugh at a particularly salacious or embarrassing detail. After a tangential explanation, the narrator returns to the main narrative thread with a conversational and improvisational sounding, "So anyway…" (52) or "I'll be honest…" (55). This is a regular feature throughout the book that becomes not just part of the characters' vernacular but also the descriptive and expressive linguistic

style that characterizes the entire narrative. This could also be compared to the queer Black vernacular strategies of Sharon Bridgforth's work, with slashes and renaming creating an expansiveness of description, using expansiveness as a method for approaching specificity or the intensity of emotion: "Our sex wasn't exhibitionism, it was public service of a kind and it made me feel high and mighty and sleepy-eyed just-been-loved" (104). The compound words here serve as stylistic antics and experimentations to do descriptive justice to the playful, hedonistic, and erotic lesbian social scene depicted. At the end of this bar scene, Leti's lover K calls her a 'Rebel girl' (104), a type of compound in itself, which conveys how Leti is not just a rebellious youth but specifically a rebel against the traditional idea of a what a girl should act like.

Lemus also deploys this linguistic play with hyphenated compound verbs that capture action that incorporates or falls between two specific verbs. For example, when Leti first meets K, she tries to sound smooth and flirtatious after her best friend embarrasses her by mentioning that she works as a dog groomer. Attempting to recover from the embarrassing career revelation, Leti says, "I kind of laugh-breathed" (64). The compound construction suggests not quite a laugh and not quite a full breath but both simultaneously, suggesting a sense of in-betweenness or too muchness, a sense of not fitting in or of feeling too much discomfort for common language to hold or express.

Lemus resorts to compound or repetitive adjectives to express a single complex idea. She describes a group of boys trying to appear tough as exhibiting "gangster-proud expressions they copied from their older brothers" (77). When describing a lover's

mouth, she says that she has "luscious orange lipstick lips" (105), using excessive detail to capture the hyper-feminine seductive excess associated with femme femininity. The flowing adjectives are imitative or expressive of a flowing feminine speech as well as a resourceful inventiveness resonant of the do-it-yourself attitude or aesthetic of the queer punk scene also being depicted. The windy descriptions and tangled phrasings make it sometimes difficult to follow the logic or action or sentence structure, contributing further to the text's "unreadable" sensibility. Lemus's linguistic play amounts to an articulation and creation of a vocabulary that can adequately express genderqueer experience where singular, straightforward wording does not suffice.

In Lemus's first work of queer Chicana fiction, it is clearly the unreadability of genderqueerness, rather than queer desire, that cause disconnects between the young Chicana protagonist and her Mexican American culture and family. Lemus's representations of genderqueerness pose questions about what it means to be seen, to be visible, or to be unseen. In *The Unexplained Presence*, poet and critic Tisa Bryant extends the work of Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* to explore how black presences in Eurocentric literatures have been used to construct ideas of whiteness. Bryant asks, "What if we grew uncomfortable with mere visibility and found power in being unseen?" Bryant's question reminds us that for minoritarian subjects, seeking visibility or arriving at a sense of being seen does not necessarily result in power, equity, justice, or positive social change.

Lemus's novel makes genderqueerness visible within a Chican@ frame yet seems

to remain uncomfortable with "mere" visibility. Lemus's text provokes an exploration of how and why queers figure as unreadable to other Chican@s in the worlds imagined by contemporary Chican@ literature. It causes us to ask how moments of unreadabiliity of the other may be interpreted not as a disavowal but as an opportunity for self-construction, how this can be not just a loss or a rendering invisible but also a productive, generative moment that in fact constitutes a self, a subject in question.

Lemus's second novel, *Like Son*, further explores genderqueer subjectivity in relation to Chicanidad. Genderqueerness in *Like Son* connects present-day queer Chican@ bodies to a lost Chican@ past. Whereas Mexico as homeland has served this function in constructing ideas of Chicanidad in previous Chican@ literature, crossing in the body in *Like Son* allows for the crossing of time and place, making the trans (transgendered, transgressive) body a site of transnational and transhistorical possibilities for broadening definitions of Chicanidad.

The novel features a female-to-male (FTM) transgendered protagonist named Frank Cruz, who struggles with coming to terms with his father's death and the haunting of untold family histories. The narrative unravels a hidden family history, centering around the avant-garde artist and writer Nahui Olin's courting of Frank's grandmother, and particularly a moment in which the two women (Nahui and the grandmother) kiss publicly at a fountain in the center of the town plaza in Mexico City, causing a family scandal in the 1920s. As it becomes revealed that the untold family histories center around deviant sexualities, Frank discovers that he is not the first openly non-

heterosexual in his family but that the history of queerness in the family has been passed down the generations via a cryptic archive of hidden photographs and inscriptions in a book.

The unspeakable presence and history of queerness within Frank's Mexican American family becomes for him a source of intrigue and inspiration. His desire to uncover his family's hidden legacy of desire drives him to abandon his current life in search of his family's past. He begins hearing or imagining the voices of ancestors, including the voice of Nahui Olin, whose picture he carries in his wallet. As Catriona Rueda Esquibel discusses in *With Her Machete in Her Hand*, this search for a queer familial history is a recurring theme in Chicana lesbian literature. Additionally, many Chicana lesbian texts, according to Esquibel, bear some direct relationship to the Chicano Movement, or at least to mainstreamed collective Chican@ history. Lemus's search for queer Chican@ history focuses on an individual, not collective, search. Lemus complicates this theme by taking up transgender issues, albeit without necessarily drawing on the language of contemporary mainstream, white queer culture.

The story shifts locales between Los Angeles, New York City, and Mexico City; the novel shifts the locus of queer Latina experience away from the West Coast and the Southwest to New York. The story incorporates 9/11 and although the characters are not directly involved, they are impacted by haunting nightmares that suggest connections between a traumatic historical event and the daily emotional trauma of being genderqueer in a homophobic world. Although the narrative centers around a transgendered character,

it does not explain much about Frank's transition. The story begins when Frank is "a man of thirty" (9), and there is little explanation of how or why Francisca has chosen to become Frank other than deciding that he feels more natural as a boy and begins wearing baggy "skater clothes." This lack of explanation leaves a cloud of mystery around Frank; on the other hand, it normalizes the idea that one can choose to live as another sex or resist living only within a traditional gender binary. The focus is not on Frank's transition but rather on how Frank's sense of his own genderqueerness is constructed in relation to his Mexican American family of origin as he separates from them into a queer adulthood.

As Lemus's second novel to engage questions of Chican@ genderqueerness, *Like Son* is an extension of the thematics explored in *Trace Elements of Random Tea Parties*, particularly genderqueerness and how it impacts and is impacted by familia, homeland, and loss. Early in the narrative, Frank's ailing, blind father dies. His death becomes a rite of passage in which Frank inherits the trappings of his father's Mexican American masculinity. Immediately after his father dies, Frank hears his father's voice telling him to keep his suits. While his father is alive, he does not acknowledge or express awareness of Frank's identification as a transgendered man. Indeed, he insists on calling Frank by the childhood nicknames Paquita or "Francisca, baby girl" (16), to which Frank has an uncomfortable visceral response, although he does not speak up. Frank's lack of response reveals the culture of silence around sexuality and gender, especially Frank's genderqueerness.

Frank reflects that as a young girl child, she wondered why her father always

wore dress clothes rather than the casual jeans and t-shirts worn by the other kids' fathers. In response to being asked about this habit of dress, the father responds by saying, "Don't ever let anyone call you a lazy wetback" (15). Frank reflects on this response and tries to draw connections to his/her own experience:

> I had no idea how that was an answer to my question. I tried asking my magic fish, but upon closer inspection, its envelope claimed it could tell me only if I was in love, lucky, or tired. Fifteen years later, I'd been dealt enough jabs—including one incident in junior high when a group of kids threw handfuls of pennies at me, called me a "beaner queer whore," and were only reprimanded by the lunch supervisor to *Sit down and eat*—that I'd come to understand my father's reasons for wanting to present a polished front. His attire and grooming was passive resistance of a most dignified form. (16)

The polished front donned by the father is a form of resistance against the daily "jabs" of racism. The construction "beaner queer whore" conflates the racial epithet "beaner" with non-normative sexuality ("queer") and sexual promiscuity ("whore"). The passage speaks to the intertwining of race and sexuality and gender expression. That this slur is lobbed at the protagonist along with "handfuls of pennies" associates such a construction with economic poverty as well. The throwing of the pennies at the Mexican American child evokes the stereotype of poor Mexican children in need of a handout as well as the collective anxiety that erupts in the United States around providing public welfare to the

poor, particularly newly arrived immigrants. Frank's realization about keeping up appearances and belonging become connections between race and queerness.

A few of the objects that Frank's father bequeaths to him include a photograph of Nahui Ohlin, a beautiful Mexican woman whose identity is at first unclear to Frank. Frank carries around her picture, given to him by his father for safekeeping. Besides the photograph, there is also a book, containing Nahui's poetry. Through the poetry, Frank learns the significance of Nahui Ohlin's name, which refers to the "fifth sun" or the current age according to ancient Aztec cosmology. Although Nahui Ohlin is based on an actual historical figure of the 1920's avant-garde muralista movement, typically associated with the likes of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, not much is known about her life. Thus, she provides a site upon which to frame a fictionalized, imagined queer Mexican history. Frank's girlfriend Natalie, whom he first meets in New York, becomes the vehicle for uncovering the mysteries of Nahui Ohlin. She also becomes a site of embodiment of Nahui, taking on her mannerisms and dress and becoming a site upon which Frank can project and enact his fantasies of who Nahui is to him. As Frank imagines himself Nahui's lover, he enacts what his grandmother could not do in her day, which is to express desire for a woman.

Against the acceptance by and inheritance from the father figure, disavowal, or the threat of disavowal, by the mother-figure looms prominently in both of Lemus's novels. In the first novel, although the grandmother does not necessarily reject Leti, she does react with shock to Leti's masculine gender expression and dies soon thereafter. In the

second novel, Frank is rejected by his traditional Chicana mother—again, not because of sexuality, but because he has chosen to live as a man. When the novel begins, Frank is estranged from his mother and has not seen her in over five years. When his father dies, he visits his mother to let her know about the death. When Frank arrives at his mother's house, his mother seems or claims not to recognize him, speaking to him through the locked screen door: "'Who are you?' she had the nerve to ask" (69). Frank dismisses his mother's reaction as her "vintage insane behavior" and he contemplates his own interior answers to the question: "I was the child she probably wished she'd never had. I was a person who wanted out of the life I was born into. But there was one thing I most definitely wasn't…I was *not* my mother's daughter" (69). Frank calls attention to the fact that he is no longer his mother's daughter, nor is he the feminine type of daughter his mother might have imagined for herself.

In fact, Frank has become his father's son. When he shows up on his mother's doorstep, with a wooden box of his father's ashes in his hand, it becomes clear that the version of masculinity Frank has inherited is a working-class Mexican masculinity. While waiting at his mother's front door, he reminisces about his mother's disapproval of him when he was a tomboyish adolescent girl. Frank recalls to himself, "All I knew was that I was a boy and that being a boy felt safe and true and right" (69). This is one of the only moments in the text in which Frank mentions his feelings about being male. It is precisely in this revelatory moment when his mother's rejection is most harshly pronounced that she looks at him pointedly and expresses her shame: "'Do you realize

what people say about you?' Her eyes scanned me up and down" (71). His mother proceeds to hand him a stash of money even though he says he does not want the money. When she closes the door in his face, Frank imagines himself a horned devil standing at her door:

> She didn't want any neighbors who might be looking down from their own hilly views to catch sight of her slamming the door on the miserable horned creature standing on her *Welcome* mat…Horns. Yes, I'm certain I had horns emerging from my temples. My father did too. (72)

Frank's vision of himself as a monstrous devil emphasizes how his mother sees him as no longer readable as her daughter yet not fully legible as a "real" man. Though he seems himself as a man and presents as man, his raced and classed masculinity seems insufficient. As Jack Halberstam notes, "Masculinity…becomes legible as masculinity where and when it leaves the white male middle-class body…Arguments about excessive masculinity tend to focus on black bodies (male and female), Latino/a bodies, or working-class bodies, and insufficient masculinity" (*Female Masculinities* 2).

Although Frank momentarily sees himself as a devil, like his father, and struggles with what that might mean, he reveals his anger toward his mother:

> She said, 'You have your father's blood in you,' and I saw in her eyes all the times my father had grabbed her tiny wrists and forced her to listen, the times he had screamed and thrown things against walls. I was not violent, but, unforgivable as it was, I did understand why my father had snapped with

anger at her. (72)

The mother's declaration that Frank is just like his father evokes the title of the novel, *Like Son*, which suggests the saying, "Like father, like son," an expression that attributes a son's characteristics and behaviors as typical or mimetic of his father's. The title also suggests that the protagonist is "like" a son, an approximation or a failed attempt, but not quite considered an actual or real son. Also, the title could also be read as an invitation or command to sympathize with the son character, particularly in the scene in which his mother rejects him. Frank's anger toward his mother in this scene amounts to a refusal of her rejection of his working-class Mexican masculinity. Given the pressure toward upward class mobility in his family, and his mother's disdain, the trans masculinity that Frank takes on is a racialized, classed masculinity, complicating his struggle at attempting to rewrite what his Mexican American masculinity can mean.

Before Frank returns to New York from his trip to his mother's house in Los Angeles, he returns his father's artifacts to a safety deposit box in L.A. These artifacts include Nahui's artifacts and a few of his father's last effects, handed down from Frank's Mexican grandmother who migrated from Mexico to the U.S. Frank's returning the items to the safety deposit box could be read simply as a cutting off, a disowning or putting away of his Mexican-ness, his family's collective memory. Or perhaps his actions suggest a moving on, the progression of grief toward a healthy acceptance. As Frank turns away from dwelling on loss toward letting it go, perhaps Frank's queer family history is not needed. The artifacts are not destroyed but neither are they carried around

and displayed in his home any longer, indicating a proper mourning has run its course. Perhaps this is like putting away an altar, which is typically perpetually displayed and cared for in a traditional Mexican American home. The grief for an unknown or unclear family past is no longer needed after it has been worked through. Because he travels from New York back to L.A. to return the items, and he decides to root himself in New York, even symbolically planting a tree in the middle of a New York street, the narrative may suggest a putting away of Chican@ dreams of reclaiming the Southwest, symbolic site of the mythical homeland of Aztlán, and moving eastward toward modern urban life where genderqueerness can flourish. In the end, Frank's moving on from Nahui Ohlin, the "fifth sun," may be his way of moving on to a newer world, severing himself from his Mexican@ and Chican@ past.

If the figure of La Malinche, Cortez's translator and mistress, has provided a way for Chicana lesbian feminists to refigure themselves as cultural translators and strategic traitors of their race, then Lemus's post-borderlands queer narratives suggest that the figure of Coyolxauhqui offers a more apt analogy for the Chicana genderqueer. Coyolxauhqui, although typically described as female, is actually dually sexed and represents both male and female powers. She is killed by her warrior brother for attempting to usurp their mother's power, and after dismembering her, her brother throws her body parts up into the sky, and she becomes the moon. The reassembled and reconstructed body of Coyolxauhqui is both female and male, reconstituted and reimagined, like the transgendered Chican@ who was born the girl Francisca and has

refashioned and reformulated himself into the man that is Frank, the quintessential post-Chicano, post-queer, post-borderlands subject.

Lemus's texts make interventions within Chican@ literature as well as within racialized constructions of gender and sexuality. By exploring how genderqueerness, but not queer sexuality, is in question within Chican@ familial and cultural contexts, loss, absence, rejection, and ejections become productive sites of struggle and meaning-making for the Chican@ genderqueer subject.[12] Lemus's novels illuminate the idea expressed by transgender activist Leslie Feinberg in *Trans Liberation*, which is that "[m]any of us have identities we have no language for" (69). While this might be a common sentiment for people who do not experience themselves as fitting into normative categories of belonging or identity, it resonates strongly with the queer Chicana/ subjects of Lemus's novels.

In a 2007 interview on the literary blog *Bookslut*,[13] author Lemus remarks, "I really, truly just wanted to write a story where I have a protagonist that can be transgendered, like Frank is, where it wouldn't be about his transgenderism, where it would be about his life." In response to the interviewer's claim that "It seems like every time someone writes an LGBTQ character, it's about their *sexuality* or their *coming-out* or their *sex*," Lemus

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[12] Interestingly, for all its commitment to gender bending, the text ultimately suggests that the desired and desirable queer life requires the form of couplehood.

[13] John Zuarino

responds, "Yeah, very often. I'm not so much interested in trying to normalize it or make it invisible. Someone paid me a huge compliment and said that, in their opinion, *Like Son* is a *post-trans* novel. In a way, it's like a *post-queer* novel where, of course, it's a central part of the book, but it's moved further out."

Indeed, Felicia Luna Lemus's fiction moves the Chican@ queer out of Chican@ community, aligning somewhat with the borderlands literary legacy of Chicana lesbian authors Anzaldúa and Moraga. Yet Lemus's work signals a much more critical move, a move toward a post-borderlands, in which queerness of gender and not just queerness of sexuality must be taken into account. Lemus's contemporary portrayals of queerness move us toward a greater understanding of the intersectionalities of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, gender, and gender identities through the productive unreadability of transgressive, racialized female masculinities.

In the next chapter, another type of unreadable female masculinity comes to the foreground in the proto-queer, quasi-historical experimental fiction of Helena María Viramtones. In *Their Dogs Came with Them,* Viramontes writes the ambiguously gendered Turtle into a violent narrative of Chican@ history, suggesting the importance of genderqueerness within a Chican@ imaginary.

Engendering a Queer Time and Place in Viramontes's

Their Dogs Came with Them

We are here to help the other

change and survive

amid the gunshot blasts

outside our iron-barred window.

— Cherríe Moraga, "We Have Read a Lot and Know We Are Not Safe," *The Last Generation*

The word 'malflora' sounded so sad to Turtle, it was a word you shouldn't be left alone with.

— Helena María Viramontes, *Their Dogs Came With Them*

The brown body's ambiguity is endlessly generative.

— Hiram Pérez, "You Can Have My Brown Body and Eat It, Too!"

Like Lemus's fiction, Helena María Viramontes's[14] latest novel *Their Dogs Came with Them* (2007) concerns itself with the plight of the genderqueer Chican@. Viramontes's text, however, places a genderqueer Chican@[15] into the context of a dystopic Chican@ past. *Their Dogs Came with Them* follows divergent Chican@ story lines through the streets of an East Los Angeles barrio during the 1960s. In an interview in the May/June 2007 issue of *Poets & Writers Magazine*, Viramontes describes her larger project as a writer as one of breaking down borders. Of the contemporary controversy over the xenophobic U.S. attempt to control the flow of Mexican immigrants by erecting a "border fence," Viramontes says: "I'd like to think that I am dismantling it, one word at a time." One of the ways Viramontes is dismantling borders is by including queerly gendered characters in her fiction and emphasizing how queer Chicanas have been an integral part of Chican@ history.

The novel is Viramontes's longest fictional work to date. Unlike her previous major works, the novel is told from multiple perspectives. It contains slippery chronologies and a challenging narrative structure that zooms back and forth between perspectives and plots. The narrative deals with difficult themes of Chican@ experience without providing any hopeful redemption or a happy ending.

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[14] Viramontes is the author of *The Moths and Other Stories* (1985) and the novel *Under the Feet of Jesus* (1995). Viramontes also co-edited, with María Herrera-Sobek, *Chicana (W)Rites: On Word and Film* (1995) and *Chicana Creativity and Criticism: New Frontiers in American Literature* (1996).

[15] Refer to the Introduction for a discussion of this term and how I deploy it in this project.

Moments of fantastical absurdity and frequent shifts across plot lines create a sense of uncertain location in time and space, fashioning an unstable world in which the characters face various types of displacement, loss, abandonment, violation, madness, and extreme loneliness. Through the disorientations produced by Viramontes's formal and narrative risk-taking, characters become unmoored from any sense of safety, home, or self.

As the novel features several young Chican@s and is set in the 1960s, readers might expect a bildungsroman following the coming-of-age of emerging players in the Chican@ Movement, or perhaps an immigrant tale of upward mobility in striving for the American dream. Or, with a queerly gendered character playing a major role, readers might expect a queer coming-out narrative. Viramontes upsets those expectations, instead providing a complex portrait of what Chicanidad looks like when loss is not redeemed. *Their Dogs Came with Them* does not turn away from the hard realities that existed alongside the political and social gains of the movimiento. Here, people do not triumph over oppression, violence does not cease, people wander the streets hungry, and struggling young people do not transform the conditions of their lives.

Into this violent narrative of Chican@ history, Viramontes writes an ambiguously gendered protagonist. Although Helena María Viramontes does not identify as queer, nor does her work typically get considered within the contexts of queer Chican@ literature, the acclaimed Chicana author has written queerness into the Chican@ historical imagination. Fiction about the Chican@ movement of the sixties and seventies written

during that time tends not to feature genderqueer characters. Viramontes, writing about the sixties from the vantage point of the current century, does include a genderqueer character. What does the text gain by that inclusion? What does examining the genderqueer character's role in the novel reveal about Viramontes's project?

The novel interweaves the narratives of four young Chicanas marginalized within their own Chican@ communities during the volatile decade. The protagonists include Ermilia, a student at Garfield High School; Tranquilina, the daughter of Christian missionaries; Ana, a young professional caring for her schizophrenic brother Ben; and Turtle, a homeless gang member who lives her life on the streets passing as a man.[16] Each of these characters attempts to navigate a world filled with the pervasive threat of violence. The queerly gendered character of Turtle provides a key to reading Viramontes's project in that Turtle's story of genderqueerness, homelessness, displacement, and violence resonates with the version of Chican@ history Viramontes is trying to tell.

Analyzing a novel that presents such difficulties in reading, I find it productive to

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[16] Although Turtle presents herself as a masculine-bodied person, the author refers to the character with feminine pronouns most of the time. Thus, I follow the author's usage when discussing specific textual example. In other parts of my discussion, I alternate between using non-gender-specific, feminine, or masculine pronouns in order to emphasize how genderqueerness is at work in the text. I count Turtle among the "four young Chicana protagonists" in a conscious attempt to expand the definition of "Chicana" to hold a queerly gendered person like Turtle.

focus on the equally illegible genderqueer character. Of the four protagonists, Turtle is the most marginalized, the most displaced, and the most disconnected. Turtle is also the character who does not survive. In a book about the losses of Chican@ history, it is Turtle who is ultimately irrevocably lost. Via the queerly gendered Turtle, Viramontes is telling a much more broken version of Chican@ history than one might expect from a hopeful, sí-se-puede Chican@ narrative of ethnic "progress." By constructing a 1960s pseudo-historical Chican@ fiction with the genderqueer Turtle as a main axis, the novel rejects any romantic notions of a nostalgic Chican@ past. As a Chican@ subject without a home, real or imagined, Turtle embodies the difficulty of claiming a unified Chican@ consciousness, or an imaginary past Aztlánian homeland that all Chican@s can rely on as a hopeful symbol of their collective future survival. The figure of the genderqueer Chican@ thus renders Chican@ history into a rather queer time and place,[17] one in which the queer brown body figures prominently.

In the novel, displacement—especially for the queerly gendered Turtle—is never a choice; it is always a violent disruption, sudden and uncontrollable. Viramontes's portrayal of Mexican East L.A. in the 1960s provides a landscape for interrogating contemporary politics of spatial control and dislocation, particularly through the ambiguously gendered gang member Turtle. The narrative begins with a child watching an old woman pack up the contents of her home, which is about to be demolished by

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[17] I draw here from Jack Halberstam's notion of a "queer time and place," in which linearity, reproduction,

bulldozers, or "earthmovers": "[T]he bulldozers had started from very far away and slowly arrived on First Street, their muzzles like sharpened metal teeth making way for the freeway." The old woman cautions the child, "Pay attention...displacement will always come down to two things: earthquakes or earthmovers." The threat of a potential rabies pandemic leads the city to place the already distressed East L.A. under quarantine, cordoning off neighborhoods with a system of roadblocks. Within these checkpoints, residents must show proof of I.D., adhere to strict curfews, and suffer brutalities imposed by a police force called the Quarantine Authority (Q.A.). The fictional events allude to times when Chican@ neighborhoods have experienced especially violent policing of their everyday movements.

In an interview conducted by critics Nancy Sullivan and Elizabeth Mermann-Jozwiak[18], Viramontes confirms that the violent policing of Latin@ bodies by armed police patrols was part of her experience growing up in East Los Angeles. Her description of restricted mobility through the barrios of Los Angeles bring to mind the militarized policing of the border that separates Mexico from the United States:

> I remember when we had curfews. We felt like criminals. We literally had to stop at points where we were asked where we were going, and what we were doing. We were trying to go into our own homes! Into our own neighborhoods! How do you think that feels? It feels horrible! So the

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and heteronormativity are disrupted to account for the alternative experiences of queers.

curfew was accurate, the rabies was not, though. The rabies was something that I made up because I am using the metaphor of the dogs. (84)

The tactic of using curfews and fences to control the movement of people of color in Los Angeles can be traced to crucial moments such as the Zoot Suit Riots of the 1940s, the Watts Riots of 1965, the school walkouts during the 1968 Chicano School Blowouts, the Chicano Moratorium of 1970,[19] and the Los Angeles Riots of Civil Unrest of 1992 following the acquittal of Los Angeles Police Department officers responsible for the beating of Rodney King. Before and during the Chicana/o Movement in particular, Latinas/os in East L.A. neighborhoods were routinely monitored and harassed as they passed through checkpoints, similar to the immigration checkpoints operated by the Immigration and Naturalization Services and now by the Department of Homeland Security. Of interest to Viramontes is how the Los Angeles police force has had a history of violence targeted at Chican@s and people of color, particularly poor and marginalized people like those depicted in the novel.

Throughout the narrative, Viramontes draws connections between the pre-Columbian Aztecs under siege by the Spaniards and the more recent experiences of poor and working-class Chican@s displaced by the increased urbanization of twentieth-

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[18] The interview was published in the book *Conversations with Mexican American Writers* (2009).

[19] See *Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (1997) by F. Arturo Rosales for a history of these events contextualized within the larger Chicano Movement.

century East L.A. Through the homeless character of Turtle, Viramontes focuses her attention on the poorest of the poor and the most displaced Chican@s in Chican@ East L.A.

The character Turtle is born female but she begins living on the streets as a man after her brother is drafted to serve in the Viet Nam war and her family rejects her. As a member of her brother's street gang, Turtle seeks to survive in a gang culture that values and depends on violent masculinities. While the author describes Turtle as "androgynous," a more apt description would be ambiguously gendered because Turtle is sometimes referred to as a woman and sometimes as a man. Turtle's marginalized and unreadable body serves as both shelter and threat. Although we never ultimately find out whether Turtle is actually queer or how she identifies, Turtle's queerness hovers as a ghostly possibility throughout the narrative.

While she is not identified explicitly as queer, Turtle's gender expression is certainly queer. Masculinity for Turtle is not performance or play. It is not fun like it is for Lemus's character Leti, who sees her gender expression as a "science experiment." Masculinity is, for Turtle, serious business. Turtle's masculinity affords her a kind of shelter on the streets in that she can avoid the physical harassment directed at vulnerable women in street life. More than once, men on the street accost Turtle when they realize that she is a woman they had mistaken for a man. As a result, Turtle tries to hide her female body in her bulky jacket and clothing in order to appear ominously tough and masculine. This strategy provides her with a semblance of freedom of mobility as she

moves through the barrio alone at night trying to find a place to sleep. In the end, however, her masculine appearance, and in particular her appearance as a Chican@ man, endangers her when the cops perceive her to be dangerous.

As the narrative tracks Turtle's displacement, it also emphasizes the significance of the place of Los Angeles. In particular, the action follows characters through demolition zones and construction zones along the newly constructed L.A. freeways. Viramontes reflects on how the freeways that altered her barrio created a spatial structure for the novel:

> I guess it's my little Faulknerian county, my Yoknapatawpha. I find it so fascinating especially in the light of immigration debates—people are always looking at us [Chican@s/Latin@s] and saying that we're newly arrived! We're newly arrived?! I am third generation, and really fourth generation in this little parcel in East Los Angeles. My mother was born and raised about half a mile from where she died seventy-eight years later. This half mile is what intrigues me so much about her living space. So I decided what I want to do is to excavate it. It just captures my imagination. Everything is there: you have the cemeteries and the freeways—two major *major* metaphors of Los Angeles, and it's all right there on the corner from where I grew up. (81-82)

Using the landscape as palimpsest to be excavated or uncovered, Viramontes writes people into the landscape who have always been there but who were invisible. Like the

Butchlalis in their “Barber of East L.A.,” Viramontes reminds the reader that there is indeed a macha or bucha in every barrio.

We first encounter Turtle when she is waking up alone in an alley after sleeping there all night:

> Turtle perspired and waited, feeling the warm air vent against her leather jacket. Daylight slowly whittled away a new morning. She stretched her cramped legs, one and then the other, and slugged her thighs to arouse her muscles, make her legs spark into a run if need be. (16)

She thinks she hears someone say her name, so she looks around and wonders whether she is being pursued by her own McBride Boys gang, by the rival Lote M Boys gang, or by the Quarantine Authority that monitors the streets.

As Viramontes leads us through Turtle's barrio streets in East Los Angeles, parallels between Turtle's dangerous street life and Luis's dangerous life as a soldier in the Viet Nam war emerge:

> She hitched up her khakis and pulled down the waist of her leather jacket. The city roadblocks were racked up and trucked out for one more day but the barricades were the least of her worries. Curfew had landed her in the alley and she slept with her knees bunched to her chest, the screwdriver at arm's distance for protection. Patrol sirens and gunshot reports of the helicopters shot through her thin veil of sleep, and she had dreamt of Luis Lil Lizard

> crouching in the jungle somewhere in 'Nam, clinging to an army-issued rifle, his fingers trembling just as hers had been. (17)

Likening the embattled, impoverished conditions of East L.A. to the war zone, Viramontes emphasizes the precariousness of the queerly gendered female body in the masculine gang culture.

Turtle's physical presence suggests that she desires to present herself as a masculine-bodied person. She wears baggy men's clothes and a bulky leather jacket and is proud of emphasizing her physical size: "Turtle was large, and her mother had once said her largeness was bequeathed from a father they called Frank, though his real name was Francisco" (19). At one point, Turtle fondly remembers wearing her father's t-shirts when she was a little girl of eight years old (18). Her size becomes a matter of import when she lives on the streets of East L.A., where an imposing physical appearance can be an asset: "Her size gave the impression that Turtle was all muscle, a birthmark of luck in a neighborhood where might makes right" (20).

Early in the narrative, we learn how Turtle got her name and why she prefers to be called Turtle:

> [I]t wasn't the nickname Tony Game, which had been given to her by a friendly Lucky Strikes-smoking gym instructor at Belvedere Junior High. The name was her *For Real* one. She had been christened Turtle—always and por vida till death do us part—when she joined the McBride Boys with

> Luis Lil Lizard hasta la muerte. The two were known as half-and-half of the cold-blooded Gamboas. (16)

Like Chonch, the protagonist of "The Barber of East L.A.," receiving an ambiguously gendered nickname serves as a rite of passage from a girl's childhood into a masculine gender expression on the streets. Unlike Chonch, however, Turtle does not receive her name from another queer person. Whereas Chonch's naming marked her entrance into a fellowship with butch dykes, Turtle's christening marks her fellowship with her brother and their gang, cementing her identity as "one half of the cold-blooded Gamboas," binding her to violent masculinity with a bond as permanent as marriage.

Turtle moves cautiously through the streets, listening to her surroundings and the people she passes on the street more often than she speaks, and she carries a tool for a weapon: "…slipped the large Workman screwdriver into the back pocket of her khakis, all the while listening. Hunger became unbearable, and she ambled to the end of the alley" (17). Turtle's masculinity allows her to hide and have a sense of mobility on the streets. This mobility is limited, and her masculinity is constructed through the particulars of the material conditions she faces. She does not have the money to buy a gun, so she carries a screwdriver for protection. She does not have money for food, no family to feed her any longer, so her time on the streets is occupied with looking for something to eat.

While wandering the streets, Turtle catches sight of herself in a store window and imagines herself with a freshly shaved head: "In another life, Turtle had kept her head

finely shaved, razor-skinned scalp shining. But as the days living on the streets turned into weeks, her hair had grown out unevenly, and she looked coffee-stained like an old kitchen sink. The studs stapled on the curves of her ears at first to disguise the Turtle in her but later to disguise the Antonia in him no longer had the glint of steel" (21). Poverty keeps Turtle from expressing the masculinity she imagines might be available to her. This is a picture of Chican@ female masculinity we do not see even in Lemus's contemporary novels, as even Lemus's working-class characters have more stable economic resources available to them to buy masculine and gender transgressive clothes and accessories that allow them to maintain a groomed manly appearance.

The various story lines that have been running parallel throughout the novel suddenly converge in a mass pile-up in the end, all centered around Turtle. After her gang forces her into physically attacking a young boy, Turtle is shot by the police. Tranquilina, who has only met Turtle once, tries to stop the police from shooting Turtle by screaming, "We'rrrre not doggggs!" (sic 324). The attempt to protect Turtle comes too late, and Turtle faces the police shooters alone and vulnerable. Turtle's narrative ends abruptly and brutally, with her dead body twisted and bleeding on the street. Just as she had been rendered invisible, she is rendered silent: "Turtle's lips weighted down to muteness" (324). Her final thought is of her brother and the dismal wisdom he had offered her: "Luis Lil Lizard had once told her that them two lived in a stay of execution" (324). With her violent life full of displacement and her seemingly inevitable violent death being gunned down by police on the street, Turtle signifies the queer

Chicana body marked by racialized and gendered violence.

Tranquilina's insistence that she and Turtle and the other Chican@s are "not dogs" makes reference to the epigraph that opens the novel. The epigraph quotes a passage from Miguel Leon-Portilla's *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico* (1962). In the passage, Aztec (Mexica) people describe the arrival of Spanish conquistadors and their packs of canines: "Their dogs came with them, running ahead of the column. They raised their muzzles high; they lifted their muzzles to the wind. They raced on before with saliva dripping from their jaws." The dogs that accompanied the conquistadores were especially trained to rip flesh, becoming yet another weapon to destroy the bodies of the colonized. In the novel, the Quarantine Authority serves the function of the attack dogs, ripping the flesh of barrio residents like Turtle as they try to move through their own streets.

In the world of *Their Dogs Came with Them,* Turtle exists in a suspended state of loss, of losing her brother Luis to the U.S. war against Viet Nam, witnessing the bulldozers tear down her barrio. At one point, she contemplates the erasure of her barrio as she literally reads the writing on the wall:

> She could read, Turtle wasn't stupid. The cross-outs, tags, new gang emblems trashed all over McBride's graffiti on the walls of the bridge—all bad news. Lote M had fingered out the McBride Boys big time, singled them out for a class-grade-A, full-blown showdown. Tearing off McBride balls, Turtle was thinking, when the street woman appeared, tick-tocking from nowhere, and

> tripped into Turtle's funnel of lamppost light. Something inside her straw bag tick-tocked. Years of street instinct murdered by fatigue and Turtle jumped, jumped, can you believe it? (217)

The blurring of barrio street life with war zone imagery makes it difficult to discern whether the tick-tocking object the bag lady carries is a bomb or a clock that marks time as the barrio is disappearing. As Turtle reads the rival gang's graffiti, she contemplates not just her fear of her barrio disappearing but her fear of her own disappearance:

> The Lote M vatos meant business and crudely chiseled away at the calligraphic tags—**Alfonso aka Big Al, Sir Santos, Palo, Lucho Libre, Luis Lil Lizard, Turtle, McBride Boys Que Rifa**. Perforating new conquerors over old ones with a blunt hammer, the remaining tags erased, shitted on, with strokes of red runny spray paint. Bold ballsy headlines, Turtle was thinking, staring at Luis's old sketch of a lizard, a blueprint for his tattoo, now effaced under red initials from Lote M. That's exactly what the Maravilla vatos planned to do on the bridge, send a dispatch announcing erasure. (217)

The dispatch announcing erasure is a callback to the image of the pack of dogs running with the Spanish conquerors in the initial image evoked in the epigraph from Leon-Portillo's *The Broken Spears*. Thus, Turtle stands witness to yet another series of conquests that have shaped Chican@ experience. This time, however, rather than a foreign imperial invasion, the colonization takes the form of an internal colonization by

other Chican@s. In the scene described above, Turtle lists her brother and herself among those to be erased. As she laments how Luis is "erased" by the state's war machine rather than the street's war machine, she lists her own name among those that may inevitably be lost to the violence of the streets.

After Luis is drafted, Turtle family begins to reject her more and more for her manly looks. Without her brother at her side, Turtle becomes vulnerable to the harsh scrutiny of her queer appearance:

> 'What's with the shaved head?' Aunt Mercy asked Amá, though Turtle stood right in front of her. Aunt Mercy had a way of excluding people from a conversation. She had a way of making people like Turtle feel invisible though they were maybe two feet from her. It made what prickly hair remained stand on its end, and she rubbed her head, a custom that she was slowly acquiring. (167)

Turtle's aunt then refers to her as "malflora." While "malflora" literally means "bad flora" or "bad flower," it is a slang term for lesbian, synonymous with "tortillera" or "jota" and considered more offensive than simply being called "lesbiana." The term also suggests that Turtle may have a physical ailment associated with her female genitalia or reproductive system, implying that she is somehow inadequately female or not fully female. Turtle's Aunt Mercy refers to Turtle as "malflora" without addressing her directly, making Turtle feel "invisible" in her own home among her own family. After this incident, Turtle resolves to leave her home. Turtle thinks to herself, "The word

'malflora' sounded so sad to Turtle, it was a word you shouldn't be left alone with" (168). Nonetheless, Turtle takes to the L.A. streets on her own.

The novel subverts the expectations associated with a queer coming-out story. Although the novel includes a queer character, it does not focus on the sexuality of that queer character; instead, through the character of Turtle, Viramontes depicts the despairing possibilities that can occur to individuals whose in-between body and under-class status compound their struggles to survive at the most basic level. Like the transgendered character Frank in Lemus's novel *Like Son*, Turtle decides to move through the world as a man, wanting to be read by others as a man. Unlike Frank, however, Turtle's gender expression is not necessarily queer in the sense of being sexually queer. Turtle's sexuality is not discussed or alluded to in any way, and her physical gender presentation is inextricably intertwined with her desire to belong to the neighborhood gang, the McBride Boys. In Carla Trujillo's coming-of-age novel *What Night Brings*, young Marci's attraction to another girl, combined with her confusion about her gender expression as a tomboy, makes her wonder about whether she was really meant to be a girl and how she can redress the situation. In Viramontes's novel, however, Turtle's gender expression serves as her street mask, her shell or protective layer that keeps her from being read as female and therefore a vulnerable target in street life. We do not ever learn whether Turtle is indeed a lesbian or whether she experiences sexual feelings at all.

Just as Viramontes subverts a queer coming-out narrative, she resists the conventions of a Chican@ coming-to-consciousness narrative. The novel subverts the expectations of coming to social consciousness literature or social protest literature of the Chicano Movement, instead showing those left behind or unaffected by the movement of the time. While hanging out near a bus stop, Turtle observes a young Chicano's obliviousness to the people around him: "To the left of the mailbox, a young pimply man read a brick of a paperback and didn't even look up to notice the woman who sat at the bus bench and rustled a grocery bag between them." She passes judgment on the young man, suggesting he is self-absorbed or disillusioned:

> Turtle guessed the scar-faced man was a Che Guevara wannabe, a brown beret flopped on his head like the mural on the wall of the Ramona Gardens housing projects. Who did he think he was fooling? Che crossed his knees. He seemed small against the large expanse of bench. Oblivious to the woman, to the morning and to Turtle, he continued to read. What a loser. (17)

Despite being in the same barrio as this Brown Beret, there exists a cavernous social distance between Turtle's world and the resistance movements being organized under the rubric of the Chicano Movement. Unlike the winning heroic narratives that position the Chican@ protagonist as an agent of social change, this novel shows the potentially disastrous consequences of not having access to organized community other than street gangs. Turtle does not seem to recognize the actual group or social movement associated

with the man's brown beret (though she does reference the Latin American revolutionary Che Guevara) but she guesses by his appearance and behavior that he aspires to radical political aims. But his revolutionary status strikes Turtle as purely academic, ineffectual, and lonely.

For a coming-to-consciousness narrative, one possible narrative strategy would have been to include a Chican@ activist as a protagonist. That strategy has been pursued by several Chican@ authors, such as Américo Paredes in his novel *George Washington Gomez* (1990), and Alicia Gaspar de Alba in her mystery novel *Desert Blood* (2005), in which a Chicana lesbian academic activist leads a community's investigation into the femicides in El Paso/Juarez.[20] As in Paredes's novel, such a strategy affords the reader the opportunity to venture into experiences of the emergent activist facing choices around whether and how to become a "voice of the people."

Viramontes sets up a similar readerly expectation via Ermilia and the high school students who bristle at the inequitable treatment they receive at Garfield High School, the site of the Chican@ school walkouts in the 1960s. However, Viramontes only flirts with the possibility that Ermilia and her comrades might become Chican@ activists; instead, she repeatedly bucks that expectation by having the girls be more drawn to forming a female street gang. In doing so, she subverts the generic conventions of building a

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[20] For a detailed case study of this ongoing gendered violence, see Kathleen Staudt's *Violence and Activism at the Border: Gender, Fear, and Everyday Life in Ciudad Juarez* (2008).

Chican@ hero/heroine in favor of showing the material pressures and social conditions that give rise to gang formation among Chican@ youth in urban barrios.

Viramontes's text disidentifies itself with previous Chican@ and queer texts, resignifying and subverting typical thematic conventions. Viramontes uses the figure of the ambiguously gendered queer racial body, in the character of Turtle, to subvert the conventions of the queer coming-out narrative and the Chican@ coming-to-consciousness identity struggle, focusing her narrative around erasure and loss rather than personal or political triumphs,

Turtle imagines herself male and masculine physically and then struggles with what those attributes mean to her socially. Aligning oneself with a masculinity that equates strength with the violent expression of coercive power over others leaves Turtle alone, abandoned, and victimized by the police force as well as by her fellow gang members. Her aberrant body finds no home in the brotherhood of the McBride Boys, no welcoming home in her biological family of origin, and no safe place on the streets to become the man she imagines herself to be. After Turtle, high on drugs given to her by her gang, stabs and kills a young man marked by her gang, an alarmed passer-by tries to interrogate Turtle about her motive: "Why? the woman asked Turtle, and kept asking" (324). Turtle, however, cannot herself make sense of the senselessness of her situation:

> 'Why' was not a word that meant something to Turtle. The PCP was wearing thin and the invincible feeling slowly dissolved. Turtle's hand ached in rising

> volume, her lip the size of California. Why? Turtle forgot why. Turtle didn't know why. She didn't make the rules. Why? Because a tall girl named Antonia never existed, because her history held no memory. Why? Go ask another. (324)

Turtle recognizes herself as what Antonio Viego refers to as a "dead subject," marked as lacking and powerless within the American popular imaginary. The police force perceives her as a brown-bodied male, which translates to them as not only a dangerous body but also a dispensable one.

In a moment of foreshadowing, Turtle gazes upon a dead female dog on the street and refuses to extend sympathy for the dog not having survived the violence of the streets:

> What are you waiting for? Come on, no one said, and Turtle jumped over a flooding gutter and into the wide intersection. At eight or eighteen, it was just like her, never paying attention to the safe harbor of space between two painted fluorescent white lines on the pavement. The rain was immediate and unmerciful and whipped her face. At the end of the storefront block, a bloodied dog's carcass from last night's search littered the street, ground raw into the pavement by car tires. Rust-colored water surrounded the carcass. It must have been female, Turtle judged, because purple droopy teats fell to one side. Black veils of flies swarmed every inch of flesh. Sorry, bitch, she thought, I didn't make the rules. The flies hung tight together, even in the

rain. (29)

In Turtle's seemingly cold reaction to the dead female dog on the street, Viramontes critiques the brutality of a violent ethic. Viramontes reflects on her exploration of violence horizontally inflicted by the oppressed on other oppressed people: "The impetus of the novel was that I was trying to understand why there was so much brown-on-brown violence. Why are we killing ourselves, and killing ourselves with such brutality?…so how did we become dogs then? If we are treated like dogs, we become dogs" (*Conversations* 85). Although Turtle fails to explicitly make the connection between the dog's ominous fate and her own brutal existence, she does apologize to the dog and distance herself from those who "make the rules." Turtle's reference to the female dog as "bitch" reminds us that Turtle has not had access to the solidarity of other females.

The fend-for-yourself attitude that seeing the female dog's dead body lying in the street evokes in Turtle mirrors the survival logic required within the material conditions of trying to live on the streets. Critic Sonia Saldívar-Hull discusses not only the brutality but also the colonized logic of the barrio in Viramontes's "Paris Rats in L.A." [which served as a seed story for the novel *Their Dogs Came With Them*]: "Instead of the media oversimplifications of barrio as gang-violence war zone, she [Viramontes] presents barrio as township, barrio as home, and its young men and women in gangs" (155). Saldívar-Hull goes on to say that "Admittedly, the gang ethic is violent, but this political narrative gives us the reasons (or *a* reason) for the violence. She offers us insights into how our children, our young women and men, are tracked to lives on the margins, on the borders,

of the United States" (155). She notes that "Viramontes gives a name, a face, and ultimately humanity to people whom the dominant group prefers to keep anonymous, sinister, and therefore easier to kill on the street or to disappear into the labyrinth of the U.S. prison system" (155). Saldívar-Hull claims that Viramontes constructs worlds that are certainly "…no Aztlán, the mythical homeland of the Aztec natives and the utopian dreamland of the Chicano nationalists of the 1960s and 1970s" (159). The L.A. barrio life portrayed by Viramontes depicts subjects for whom "Aztlán does not exist" (159). If Antonia never existed, neither did her potential history, nor an imagined Aztlánian homeland. Turtle has no usable Chican@ past to recall and no access to a queer history with which to insert herself as an imaginable and legible subject of experience.

Turtle and the other characters of *Their Dogs Came with Them* are indeed far removed from the imagined unity of an Aztlán homeland or the sense of shared political impetus Aztlán provides. Lázaro Lima comments on the construction of Aztlán in the Chican@ imaginary: "Indeed it was the paucity of narrative models that made the Chican@ movement found a public identity centered on Mexico's indigenous heritage and the greatness of the Aztec civilization through the invocation of Aztlán, the mythic homeland of the Aztec in the southwestern United States" (17). As Lima claims, "Aztlán created a logic of presence that grounded Chicano experience and being *in* the United States, thereby making Chican@s heirs to an indigenous historical tradition that antedated the Anglo-American presence in the country" (17). Lima describes the construction of Aztlán as a Chican@ homeland as "a cultural nationalist assault on

American cultural amnesia" and argues that Latino as a "crisis identity becomes historical in order to assert a continuous presence, resisting the false notion that *all* Latinos are newcomers to the United States." In Lima's estimation, "the racializations of Latinos and the presumptive grounds by with [sic] they have been constructed almost exclusively as extranationals in the public sphere—from the Mexican-American War to the present—have sustained and implicitly sanctioned a 'tiered democracy of bodies' where certain national bodies matter more than others" (169). For Viramontes, writing Turtle into the historical fiction of East L.A. asserts the historical presence of the marginalized, unrecognizably genderqueer Chicana body into the narrative of Chicanidad.

Regarding the role of Aztlán in understanding her queer identity as a Chican@, Moraga, in her "Queer Aztlán" essay in *The Last Generation*, asserts that "Aztlán gave language to a nameless anhelo [ache] inside" her. Turtle has no language to name her ache other than “hunger,” and no language to name her experience as a Chican@, much less as a queer or a genderqueer Chicana, other than "malflora." Additionally, Turtle has no queer or lesbian community or context in which she can even begin to make sense to herself as queer. Turtle becomes like the turtle image evoked in Moraga's *Loving in the War Years,* in which Moraga asserts that no one wants to be made so vulnerable: "Nobody wants to be made to feel the turtle with its underside all exposed, just pink and folded flesh." While Moraga uses this image to describe her desire to become butch and to feel less vulnerable, it suggests a penetrability of the female body that amounts to death for a female masculine woman who does not want to be made to feel exposed or

vulnerable. In fact, Turtle does not want to feel at all and is surprised at the pain she feels upon death: "Stunned, Turtle looked bewildered and then felt a sticky ball of grit push from between her swollen lips...Only the pain, which overwhelmed, surprised her" (324).

Upon Turtle's death, the novel ends abruptly, with the religious Tranquilina walking towards the police, who still have their guns drawn. In a rather ambiguous ending, Viramontes leaves us without a known path for Tranquilina and the others; we do not know whether the police shoot Tranquilina as well. As this tale of Chican@ barrio history closes with Turtle's loss and no hope for a certain future, the history locating us in a queer time and place. In this queer time and place, Viramontes disrupts heternormative versions of Chican@ history. She resists telling traditional Chican@ narratives, such as the sprawling multi-generational saga or narratives of traditional Chican@ family (such as those by Sandra Cisneros or Oscar Casares), that enact heternormative assumptions about time and place. These assumptions include linearity of time progression, passing culture on from generation to generation, and being connected to romantic homeland, with the associated nostalgia and fantasy of Mexico in memory. Not only is such a fantasy of a past Mexico present in books like *Caramelo* (2002) but also in Lemus's more supposedly queer Chican@ novels, making *Their Dogs Came with Them* even queerer in its construction of time and place. Indeed, unclear time serves as the modus operandi for this novel, as the focus shifts across plot lines as well as back and forth through time unexpectedly. By showing the urban decay destroying the 1960s East L.A. and referencing the arrival of the Spanish into ancient Mexico, it becomes uncertain which

moment of colonization the characters are experiencing. Relationships among characters are not neatly categorizable into a traditional nuclear family structure or single-family household dwellings or even into immediate and extended family. Neighborhood children spend significant time with elderly neighbors, making it unclear where the kids actually live. Turtle has flashbacks to living at home with her parents and brother and being visited by aunts and uncles, but she spends most of the novel homeless, trying to survive on the streets. At one point, she contemplates going to a neighbor for help but chooses not to because she fears rejection for her masculine appearance and for her association with the McBride Boys gang. The Chican@ community Viramontes depicts in this novel is not a recognizably heteronormative one.

Just as in Anzaldúa's poem, "El otro lado," Turtle is cast to the other side, beyond the sheltering border of her family, her gang, her barrio. Turtle's narrative ends abruptly and brutally, with her dead body twisted and bleeding on the street. Viramontes effectively uses the genderqueer figure to turn the turtle over onto its back to look at its fleshy parts and how they can be hurt. Viramontes exposes the soft underbelly of Chican@ history, turning it over to reveal what happens in the interstices when people are not becoming queer or becoming free. Rather, Viramontes focuses on in-between bodies, in in-between places that are and are not East L.A., during in-between times that are and are not Chican@ history.

Just as Viramontes's novel zoomed backwards through Chican@ history, the next chapter takes us back in time to fiction that questions the place of the Mexican and

American queer at the historical moment of 1848. I turn to a recovered text that, through its focus on genderqueerness, disrupts contemporary chronologies of Chicana lesbian feminist literature of the twentieth century.

Long before *Brokeback Mountain*: The Queer Case of Jovita González's *Caballero*

> To begin to theorize gender and sexuality as distinct though intimately entangled axes of analysis has been, indeed, a great advance of recent lesbian and gay thought…There is danger, however, that that advance may leave the effeminate boy once more in the position of the haunting abject—this time the haunting abject of gay thought itself.
>
> —Eve Sedgwick, *Tendencies*

> Luis Gonzaga and Carl Devlin prayed that they might go East together in summer.
>
> —Jovita González and Eve Raleigh, *Caballero*

In this chapter, I turn to a recovered text that, through its untimely focus on genderqueerness, disrupts commonly held chronologies of Chicana lesbian and queer literature. Nearly one hundred years after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo marked the official end of the U.S.-Mexico War and forged a significant portion of Mexico into the U.S. Southwest, a folklorist and historian named Jovita González set out to chronicle what she saw as the loss of a distinctly Mexican way of life along the U.S./Mexico

border. As Margaret Mitchell's 1936 *Gone with the Wind* romanticized the story of the Civil War in the American imagination, William Faulkner's novels complicated the idea of whiteness in the antebellum U.S. South, or Richard Wright's 1938 short story collection *Uncle Tom's Children* confronted readers with the harsh social realism of black survival in Jim Crow America, Jovita González's fiction ambitiously sought to put Mexican America on the map.

González's historical novel *Caballero* fictionalizes the 1848 moment and the impact this crucial turning point had on the predominantly rural and ranch-dependent populations of what is now South Texas, where ranch owners and workers suddenly found themselves to be the first inhabitants of a newly colonized Mexican America. The novel's narrative thrust follows members of the Mendoza y Soría family upon the U.S. Anglo invasion of Mexico and the resultant tumultuous transition in which much of the Mexican owning class were catapulted into the hordes of dispossessed in a newly colonized territory.

Among the cast of displaced characters in Jovita González's account of the early Mexican American borderlands appears Luis Gonzaga. Luis is an effeminate and artistic gentleman. His own father describes him as a "marica" (faggot) unfit to inherit the vast landholdings of Rancho La Palma de Cristo. This queerly gendered figure emerges in a seemingly unlikely source, a 1930s historical novel in which the Mexican ranchero Luis Gonzaga falls in love with the Anglo U.S. army officer Captain Devlin. Sixty years before *The New Yorker* published Annie Proulx's gay cowboy love story "Brokeback

Mountain," Mexican American author Jovita González was exploring gay cowboy love in the historical romance that eventually became the novel *Caballero*. Why would a historical fiction of ethnic Mexicans in the U.S., written in a time and place historically—and contemporaneously—fraught with divisive racial tensions, concern itself with the marica, the Mexican American queer? And how does González's *Caballero* figure into the narrative of Mexican American and American literatures? These are some of the critical questions I explore as I consider the queer content as well as the queer context of the novel's writing, loss, re-discovery, and production.

Although *Caballero* was written in the 1930s, the novel was rejected by publishers during González's lifetime and was not published until it was discovered in her archives by José Limón and María Cotera in the 1990s. Published in 1996, *Caballero* prompted reconsiderations of pre-WWII Chican@ literary production. Additionally, González's proper place in the narrative of Chican@ literature also continues to be plagued by uncertainties about her possible co-author, Margaret Eimer, who used the pen name Eve Raleigh and whose exact role in co-authoring the novel remains open to question.

Limón and Cotera's laudable recovery of González's novel certainly marked a significant textual event in Chican@ studies. Their recovery of Jovita González's lost manuscripts also opens avenues of possibility. Building upon their work, I would like to take up questions of queerness within and around González's work. That the novel's significant focus on the queer character of Luis Gonzaga has gone mostly unremarked in the book's critical reception, considered alongside what I consider to be queer gaps in the

story of González's authorial collaboration, allows for an exciting opportunity to contribute further to the recovery project. The case of Jovita González allows us to draw connections between heritage recovery projects and queer recovery projects, particularly when the texts and textures recovered from those archives intersect. González's resurfaced *Caballero* prompts us to examine what it means to include González's work in a queer Chican@ cultural and literary lineage.

I am arguing for the integral role of genderqueerness or nonnormative gender expression in redefining Mexican American cultural imaginaries, and in this chapter, I question what it means to construct knowledge of queer borderlands experience through a recovered text. I examine the politics of the recovery and critical reception of González's *Caballero*, and I discuss how we might make use of González's novel as a case for reconsidering the interdisciplinary issues and implications of queer readings of recovered minoritarian texts more broadly. In interrogating the relationships between Chicana literary production and knowledge production, I argue for a rethinking of González's work as a contribution not just to a Chicana literary archive but also to a *queer* Chicana literary archive.

Critics have tended to regard Jovita González's novel *Caballero* as somewhat critical but largely celebratory of the union between Anglo and Mexican cultures in the context of the violent circumstances by which such contact came about (Limón, Cotera, J. González, Montes). I would add, however, that the novel also provides an alternative affective history of the borderlands as well as an alternative queer historical fiction. A

predominant theme that courses through the narrative is the patriarch's fear of domination, particularly through the effeminization of masculinist Mexican culture, and his ultimate resignation and utter hopelessness that his sense of Mexican-ness will survive the U.S. Anglo conquest of northern Mexico.

I contend that it is not just race or class or gender or sexuality but genderqueerness that provides a mechanism through which González constructs an alternative affective, queer history of the Mexican American borderlands that explores the fear of colonial domination, particularly through the effeminization of culture and the expressions of non-heteronormative sexualities and genders.

Caballero also queers the historical romance genre, complicating ideas about the relationship and "marriage" of two nations. Further, *Caballero* can also be said to explore a liminal space and time between colonial and postcolonial moments and subjectivities. The novel's queer content is unusual for an early or pre-movimiento Mexican American work of fiction (the novel was written in the 1930s and is set in the mid-nineteenth century). It was not until the publication of John Rechy's work in the 1960s and '70s that gay male Chicano sexuality was openly discussed in literary works, making González's willingness to represent queer Mexicanidad worthy of attention. Additionally, the novel's significant focus on genderqueerness marks it as particularly unusual and untimely for an early twentieth-century novel.

I would also like to consider how the queer story of the book's history gives rise to a queer feeling about Jovita González and her work. What does it mean to press the

author's life or presumed identity into service of examining how queerness is constructed and represented in the novel? Given the historical erasures and recovery project, it seems productive to at least open this line of questioning around the impact of authorial anxiety and attendant questions of "authenticity" and their impact on or relationship to the queer content and context of the book.

My goal here in a queer reading of *Caballero* is threefold. First, I want to recover a queer artifact of Mexican American literary culture and articulate the implications of such a recovery. Second, in claiming González as a contributor to a queer Mexican American archive, I demonstrate how González's fiction prefigured some of the Chicana lesbian feminist concerns expressed in literary texts of the late twentieth century. Third, throughout this process of queer re-recovery, I uncover the unlikely and integral role that queerness plays in the construction of Mexican American cultural imaginaries.

> To give an example of how *Caballero* invites us to think queerly about gender in the early U.S./Mexico borderlands, I would like to highlight a key passage from the text in which Luis Gonzaga and Captain Devlin see each other for the first time. The scene reads like a typical love at first sight moment, with both men immediately captivated by the other. As Luis and his brother Alvaro and their vaqueros ride across a stream on their father's vast ranch, they unexpectedly encounter a group of mounted U.S. army officers crossing the stream in the opposite direction. Struck by the sight of the U.S. captain, Luis stops to stare. Equally struck, Captain Devlin stares back at Luis. The full passage reads as

follows:

> The last one [Luis] stayed on the bank, sheer curiosity in the searching look he gave the Americans. Devlin slowed to return it in kind, smiled, and stopped. He reminded him of one of El Greco's portraits. Surely this lad was no rancher. He looked like a poet or an artist should look--and so seldom did. And on the striking black-maned dun pony, sitting on the elaborately trimmed saddle with the ease of a long familiarity with it, he made a picture which thrilled Devlin through and through. He was about to speak to him when an insolent voice called, "Come on, Luis Gonzaga, can't you find anything better to look at than a gringo's face?'
>
> A blush suffused the sensitive face as he answered, 'I'm coming, Alvaro.' He gave Devlin a last glance after he turned, then spurred the dun into the water.
>
> Later in the evening, when warming themselves by the fire…Devlin remarked casually, 'I hope I meet that boy under more pleasant circumstances. I like him. Rather more than merely like him.' (48)

Through a contemporary queer lens, it is impossible not be struck by the audacity of the characters' openly expressing their desire for each other as well as González's boldness in interweaving this homoerotic story into this historical novel. When Alvaro chastises Luis for giving his attention to a "gringo's face," his rebuke frames the rigid expectations of the gendered as well as cross-racial behavior demanded of Luis. With multiple taboos mobilized at once, the two men, one a Mexican rancher and the other an Anglo soldier tasked with seizing control of the land and its people for U.S. control, enter into a

dangerous cross-cultural, same-sex connection.

This passage of the Mexican and Anglo men meeting along the water recalls the moment of contact between the Mexica indigenous peoples and Spanish colonizing forces. Like the legend of the Mexica assuming the conquistadors on horseback were gods arriving according to prophecy, Luis is struck by the vision of the white army officer approaching on horseback. Indeed, in the 1840s in which this novel begins, whiteness would still be considered an unusual and spectacular sight to the local brown people in northern Mexico.[21]

The men on horseback fulfill, at least visually, the picture of the gentlemen, the idealized masculine American cowboy and vaquero figures of the U.S. southwest. To Devlin, Luis looks like a poet—like a poet seldom does, evoking an idyllic image of what a gentleman poet should look like, and also suggesting that poets do not usually look like a Mexican--what's a poet doing riding a horse on a ranch in Mexico? The use of the colloquial "gringo" rather than the proper "Americano" within earshot of the Americano soldiers suggests both the language differences as well as well as the intense emotions at work. Alvaro's use of the derogatory term "gringo" captures the anger and tension of the Mexican ranchers under invasion. When Alvaro chastises Luis in front of the Americanos, he demonstrates his superior status as older brother of the ranchland. Yet

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[21] Also, González is writing this post-Mexican revolution, post-WWI, and in a region that continues to be highly segregated along Anglo and Mexican lines. Much of the novel's content is inflected by her anthropological research sites in South Texas, which are still predominantly populated by Mexican@s

Alvaro's anger seems directed at Luis's fascination with the gringo, at how intensely both men are struck by the sight of each other, and at the openness of their intimate visual exchange. At issue is how Luis is struck by men, by their faces, not by not looking at appropriate objects of desire such as Mexican women and their bodies.

Caballero situates south Tejas as the locus of international and ideological warfare between the U.S. Anglo imperial project and the network of micro-empires that constituted the Mexican hacienda ranching system, which operated in relative autonomy given their farflung geographic distance from the central seat of Mexican national government, having only been independent from the Spain since 1821 and relying heavily on the localized sufficiency of the paternalistic agrarian system. In González's fictional account of Mexico's failed defense against the U.S., it is not just Anglo dominance but Mexican patriarchy and hacienda provincialism against which many Mexicans resist. Within the narrative's historical frame constructed and re-imagined by González, the novel disrupts binaries of south/north, Mexican/Anglo, colonized/colonizer, ally/enemy. It also complicates what a gendered critique of Mexican and American/Anglo patriarchy entails in that it raises questions not just of female/male experience or queer/straight sexualities but also of nonnormative/normative gender expressions—in this case via the effeminate marica.

Significantly, the character of Luis is established not just as queer but also as an artist. Devlin says he wants to possess the liveliness of Luis's art. The local priest (Padre Pierre) notices Luis's artistic inclination and provides Luis with art supplies so he can

paint portraits of the saints but the portraits he creates are too worldly and "unsaintlike" (such as Saint Cecilia at the harp). When the priest learns that Devlin is interested in art as well, he shows Devlin some of Luis's sketches. Devlin learns from the priest that Luis is an outcast and that his father calls him marica, and he asks the priest to arrange a meeting with Luis (105). The men meet in the church and Devlin says he wants "to possess the liveliness of Luis's art." He tells Luis that if he is serious about his art, then he should be practicing/studying art in Baltimore, which thrills Luis (106). Devlin and the priest seem privy to knowledge they desire to share with Luis: "Shall I tell our friend of us and our land?" says Devlin, to which the priest replies, "Do." (106). This conversation reads as coded language for some secret joto-landia or gay utopia. Luis returns home after his meeting with Devlin and the priest, and Luis's father expresses disapproval at his son's art supplies (108).

Soon after, Luis sees Devlin at the Catholic church in town. Luis wants desperately to touch Devlin's hand. Luis puts his hand on Devlin's hands, and the two men stand holding each other's hands for a few minutes while talking. Luis is so distracted by Devlin that forgets he is supposed to monitor his sister's behavior and fails to see that Robert Warrener has been holding Susanita's hand, breaking a social code to touch the hand of an unmarried woman without parental or familial supervision (117). When Luis and his sister Susanita discuss her love for the Anglo soldier Robert Warrener, they make a sibling pact and agree to keep the shared secret. Luis does not reveal his desire to go to Baltimore with Devlin (108), but we do learn through narrative description that "Luis

Gonzaga and Carl Devlin prayed that they might go East together in summer" (118).

Beyond the queer content of the novel itself, the queer story of the book's production history gives rise to a queer feeling about Jovita and her work. It raises questions about what it means to press the author's life or presumed identity into service when examining how queerness is constructed and represented in the novel.

In the "Introduction" to *Caballero*, Limón details what is known of the collaboration between the novel's co-authors, Jovita González and Eve Raleigh, real name Margaret Eimer (*Caballero* xviii). Based on extensive archival analysis, Limón deduces that González's collaborator may have reformulated González's original, fictionalized ethnographic narrative into a romance novel: Eimer may have done the initial crafting of González's contribution into the form of the romance novel, although undoubtedly such a contribution would have included González's specific narrative delineation of at least the Mexican characters—by far the great majority—in the novel and likely the Anglos as well (xx). That Limón "strongly believe[s] that Eimer had a strong authorial hand in shaping the romantic plot development of *Caballero*" suggests that the marriage of U.S. South and Greater Mexico depicted in *Caballero* is partly a U.S. Southern, not just a Mexican, construction. As Limón notes, not much is known about Eimer's origins but it is known that she and González probably met in Del Rio, Texas, and that the two women continued collaborating and corresponding after González moved with her husband to San Antonio and Eimer moved with her uncle to Missouri.

In *Native Speakers*, which compares González's ethnographic fiction with that of Zora Neale Hurston and Ella Deloria, Cotera argues for "[g]endering the politics of collaboration in *Caballero*" (203) and acknowledging the erotics of collaboration between the fictional artists Luis and Devlin through the "convergence of art and queer desire. Cotera also suggests that this merging of artistic and sexual desire may have informed the authorial collaboration between González and Eimer. Cotera notes, "No doubt González and Eimer figured their own collaborative relationship *in this way*" (223, emphasis mine).

I take this suggestion a step further to contend that we can specifically read González as a queer writer co-creating a queer Mexican American text. Because her life has all the traditional trappings and markers of heterosexual coupledom, González is illegible or unreadable as queer. But González's depiction of Luis as the queer artist who must collaborate with Anglo culture provides a key for reading the queer collaborations and couplings that fill and surround the narrative.

By cordoning off gendered collaboration from racial collaboration, the prevailing critical approach has been to view González and Eimer as crossing racial boundaries in their Mexican-Anglo collaborative effort. Certainly, there is validity in looking at their project as a collaboration between Anglo woman and Mexican woman. Yet, their collaboration may also be read as a same-sex collaboration, a labor of love between women.

As Cotera elsewhere notes, "There is a kind of dominant narrative about Jovita González's interactions with the founding fathers of Texas history and folklore studies. The narrative goes something like this: Jovita González, daughter of the old (*Tejano*) order, collaborated with the sons of the new (Anglo) order, but did so with a degree of ambivalence that complicates the generally nostalgic tone of her folklore work" (4). Cotera further explains that "Scholarly assessments of González's folklore writing have generally gravitated between readings of her ideology as either 'accommodationist' or, in the best case, as engaging in a form of muted resistance. The tenor and narrative structure of this [*Landmark*], her earliest lengthy analysis of the border and its people suggests a much more oppositional and resistant subject" (29). According to Cotera, "For González the 'founding fathers' of Texas were not the heroes of the Texas Revolution—Austin, Bowie, Houston—but the Criollo and Mestizo heads of families who established ranches along the Rio Grande in the eighteenth century. Her recovery of the story of their settlement of South Texas establishes the rootedness of Mexicans in Texas and thus counteracts the 'rhetoric of dominance' [Sanchez-González] that sought to make them invisible" (17). Cotera rightfully claims that, "[i]ndeed, in González's version of Texas history the Texas Revolution and the U.S.-Mexico War fade into relative obscurity, and become simply two more examples in a long history of 'border troubles' whose origins were essentially transnational in nature" (18). González's attentiveness to daily life, women's experience, and queer experience certainly takes center stage as she seeks to bring these invisible histories to the fore.

Limón and Cotera's textual recovery of González's *Caballero* did more than merely add an entry to the revised canon of Mexican-American literary products; it was a major textual event that invited scholars in multiple fields to re-imagine literary and historical narratives of American histories of the U.S. conquest of Mexico. With limited information and partial manuscripts at hand, the editors pieced together two separate versions of the novel, selecting from each manuscript to build the published edition. In the process, they established Jovita González as the primary author. González's recovered *Caballero* novel is one of the few documents, literary or historical, to relate ethnographic accounts from early Mexican Texas. Limón and Cotera speculate that González wrote the novel in the 1930s, based largely on her research of folklore and family histories from the generations of Mexicans who experienced what was commonly called "the invasion of the *Americanos*." Given the evidentiary gaps in the record of early literary efforts by Mexicans in the U.S., the publication of such a book indeed carries great cultural significance.

Discovery of the manuscripts of *Caballero* was facilitated by a 1970s interview of the author, conducted by historian Marta Cotera, María Cotera's mother. The elder Cotera verified the existence of the unfound novel when interviewing Jovita González and her husband E.E. Mireles. During the course of this interview, Mr. Mireles claimed to have destroyed the manuscript of *Caballero* to protect his wife from political backlash against Mexicans in South Texas. However, Jovita González slyly indicated otherwise, wagging her finger in a gesture of "No," which only the interviewer could see.

Unbeknownst to her husband, Jovita González signaled to Cotera that the manuscript still existed. This revelation enabled Marta Cotera to report her findings to María Cotera and José Limón, who—finally—located the manuscripts in an archival repository in South Texas. Once the scholars discovered the manuscripts, they edited and published them as the novel *Caballero*, thereby placing Jovita González among the handful of the "first" Mexican-American women authors of the twentieth century. Significantly, González remains among the few known Mexican-American authors prior to the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and '70s.

González's manuscripts were typed on the reverse side of recycled sheets—discarded pages from manuscripts, personal correspondence, and so forth. Presumably, unused sheets of the finest quality available to the authors would be preferred for presenting their "final" manuscript to New York publishing houses. We can surmise from the co-authors' correspondence and from their "Authors' Notes" (marked as the "Foreword" in the typescript) that they considered the copy (found by Limón) to be an "uncorrected" carbon copy. It is this uncorrected version that the editors compiled, along with chapters from the other manuscript, into the finalized novel.

In fixing the text of *Cabellero*, the editors attempted to resolve the question of authorial collaboration in order to restore Jovita González to primary authorship. The title page of the first published edition of *Caballero* (1996) contrasted against a copy of the original title page from the original manuscript reveals how the question of authorship remains open to interpretation. The title page of the original typescript listed a co-author,

Eve Raleigh, identified as a pseudonym for Margaret Eimer, an unknown figure whose authorial--and authoritative--role remains questionable. (Note the significance of Eimer's choice to discard her German surname in favor of the pseudonym Raleigh, evoking a Southern gentility designed, without a doubt, to position the novel as a U.S. Southern Anglo rather than merely Southwest Mexican-American epic.) According to the typed manuscript, the centered title reads as follows: "CABALLERO / An historical novel by / Eve Raleigh / and / Jovita González" [sic]. The original title page lists two authors. The prominent placement of Eve Raleigh's name and mailing address on the top left positions her as the one who has "submitted" the manuscript, presumably to the three publishers discussed in their various correspondence. Notably, in one letter from Eimer to González, Eimer apologies for placing her name first but claims that she did so because a potential publisher she was in communication with had assumed she was merely "the compiler."

The co-editors sought to locate evidence of the "real" person behind the figure of the pseudonym, attempting to determine her role in authoring—and authorizing—the manuscript. They were unable to do so, raising questions about Raleigh as an unverifiable co-author or possible ghost author. The editors were also unable to disprove Raleigh's contributions. Thus, they included her name on the title page. However, the editors reversed the order of the names as they appeared in the only existing title page in the manuscripts, placing González above Raleigh.

In piecing together the textual puzzle, the editors filled in what they refer to as narrative gaps, attempting to avoid disrupting the narrative flow. In the manuscripts, the authors marked some long passages "omit" or removed them from one version of the manuscript. The editors included some of these omitted passages into the final text, asserting that their omission would disturb the coherence of the story. For example, one authorial deletion subsequently overridden by the editors removes the narrative possibility of heavenly intervention to protect Mexico from U.S. domination. In one passage in the manuscripts, González (or perhaps Eimer acting as co-author or preliminary editor) made handwritten corrections to delete a section in which the Mexican protagonist, a Catholic and a land-owning gentleman, imagines the Virgin Mary watching over his ranchlands prior to the American invasion: "He would not have been surprised, so carried away was he for the moment, if the Virgin herself in her robe of blue had come floating over the gateway, hands stretched out to them, praying with them." This authorial revision may reveal the conflicting desires of the author. González frequently drew on her ethnographic research, in which she documented Catholic and folk spiritual ritual practices in South Texas, in order to create folkloric representations of the Mexican experience. However, marking these passages for omission suggests that González was in the process of revising her novel into a more palatable narrative, compromising or altering wording in order to avoid accusations of pro-Catholic, pro-Mexican (i.e. anti-American) sentiment. Despite her deletion of this passage, the editors chose to include it in the published version.

At the word and sentence level, some items not legible to the editors remain so marked in the printed edition. For example, in the first chapter, a Mexican woman expresses disgust at the suggestion that Mexicans in what has become the Southwest U.S. must choose whether to become citizens of the U.S. She exclaims, "We do not choose to be [dirty] *Americanos*." In the noted explanation, the editors explain as follows: "Bracketed word is marked out by a single line in MS2. We restore it here for the evident ideological import of this change."

While the authors' queer love story, no doubt questionable for its time, remains prominently included throughout both of their original manuscripts, my own comparison of the manuscripts revealed one intriguing sentence marked for omission by the authors that was also omitted by the editors. In an earlier version of the *Caballero* manuscript, the passage in which Luis and his sister Susana exchange secrets pushes at the edges of allowable non-heteronormativity. In what purports to be the earlier draft of the manuscript, there is a sentence that speaks volumes about how González, and perhaps her co-author, may have imagined Luis and Devlin's narrative of same-sex desire as analogous to the romance plot between Susana and Warrener. In the passage in question, Susana playfully threatens Luis with telling their parents about his feelings for the *Americano* Captain Devlin. In the revised version of the manuscript, Luis teases Susana that he will tell their parents of her love affair with an Anglo captain, but Susana does not tease Luis in this manner. The deleted part reads as follows: "'You want to tease me,

Luis, but I don't even want to listen. I'll tell her [mama] you're in love.' She laughed, hurried into the house."

If we do read Caballero as a national romance, as many critics have suggested, then it follows that we must not overlook the major narrative plot involving the queer national romance between the Mexicano Luis Gonzaga and the Americano Captain Devlin. If other parts marked for deletion by the authors were included by the editors for "narrative flow" or for their "ideological import," then we should certainly consider the narrative and ideological import of this deleted sentence regarding Luis Gonzaga's attraction to Captain Devlin.

To learn more about González's own desire to construct a queer Mexican American text, we can turn to her own archives. Several researchers have been interested in finding out exactly who Raleigh was, where she was from, and her cultural background in order to understand her co-authorship with González. But something in my initial exploration of González's work set off what I call my "intellectual gaydar." I began to wonder at the nature of the relationship between the two female co-authors, partly because of the continued confusion concerning their collaboration, the suppression of their work by González's husband Mireles, and the significant portion of their novel dedicated to telling the story of a same-sex relationship between a Mexican and an Anglo.

As I delved further into González's archives at Texas A&M University at Corpus Christi, I focused my search on correspondence between the co-authors. My other goal was to determine if González's well-documented ethnographic research on South Texas

folklore included any stories of gay characters upon which the novel's Luis might be based, a strategy she employed for the development of many of her fictional characters. The most fruitful documents from this particular search included a couple of letters from Eimer to González. Over time, and after Eimer moved away from Texas, it seems that González wrote back to Eimer less frequently, and as a result Eimer's letters to González grew increasingly odd and desperate for González's attention (saying things like, "have you dropped me out of your life" and "I miss how we were"). Reading them through a contemporary lens, Eimer's letters seem like declarations of love for González, with Eimer wondering if González still loved her. Based on these findings, I suggest that their collaboration was quite queer, and that we can productively interpret the act of these two women co-authoring an interracial historical romance as a queer erotic practice.

To be clear, my queer reading of the author here is not necessarily about discovering if the author was in fact queer or lesbian as we understand that now but about opening up her work to queer lines of inquiry. I want to use this as an opportunity to pose questions about how we come to know or construct a queer Mexican American text. What does it mean to allow ourselves our queer desire for a text? What does it look like to be in search of a queer borderlands history? How might we broaden the way we construct new knowledge when we recover texts? "Lost" manuscripts may result not just from misplaced, suppressed, destroyed, or otherwise lost papers but from people's lost experiences, and lost lives, lives and knowledges that may have been lost to them and

may be lost to us. Yet, what productive new knowledges can we construct from what we may never know of our own histories, literatures, and queer cultures?

In posing such questions, I wish to elucidate the *potentially* radical queer love that effervesces throughout and potentially around the text. I emphasize "potentially" here because in the novel, queer love is proffered as a potentiality. And in reading González and Raleigh's collaboration as a potentially radical queer love in its time and place, I mean to emphasize its retroactive potentiality.

As noted, many critics have categorized *Caballero* as a historical romance. Others have described it as an ethnographic novel. Some simply refer to it as a historical novel. Based on such a range of descriptors, we can gather that *Caballero* may be one and all of these. Despite its blurring of ethnography, the novelistic form, historical fiction, and romance, because the novel depicts the "marriage" of two cultures, it is understandably its romance factor that dominates critical discussions. Yet, it remains unclear why Susana's romantic plot supersedes discussions of the novel if Luis's romantic plot parallels Susana's throughout most of the narrative. Perhaps Sedgwick's notion of effeminophobia can provide a useful framework for understanding this critical oversight. In *Tendencies*, Sedgwick astutely asserts that "[t]o begin to theorize gender and sexuality as distinct though intimately entangled axes of analysis has been, indeed, a great advance of recent lesbian and gay thought" (156). She goes on to explain that, "There is danger, however, that that advance may leave the effeminate boy once more in the position of the haunting abject—this time the haunting abject of gay thought itself" (156). To some

degree, John Rechy's gay Chicano fiction has become a kind of haunting abject within Chican@ studies, as his work holds a contentious and uncertain place within some nodes of Chican@ critical thought. Rechy's overt queerness was later eclipsed by the conservative literary antics of Richard Rodriguez and the emergence of a formidable body of Chicana lesbiana literature in the 1980s. Within the *Caballero* narrative, the effeminate artist figure skirts close to becoming the haunting abject, that which cannot abide within the Mexicano familial and ranching structure as it desperately seeks to survive in the face of the U.S./Americano takeover.

Luis's ejection from his father's ranch borders between self-exile and forced expulsion but ultimately writes the queer out of Mexico and into the U.S. Luis, then, becomes a figure of queer migration. In Eithne Luibheid's edited volume *Queer Migrations*, Lionel Cantú reflects on his experience of being called upon as an expert witness a case in which Mexican gay men were seeking asylum in the U.S. based on their sexual orientation. Cantú posits that these scenes of legal negotiation mobilized sympathy from the courts through reinscribing two overlapping cultural assumptions. The first assumption put into play was that effeminized gay Mexicans were simultaneously considered shameful for their lack of proper masculinity and also in need of protection by the state as persecuted or endangered subjects. The second assumption at work was that the relative freedom proffered by the U.S. rested on the "colonialist and racialist" ideas that the U.S. affords its (sexual) citizens better protections (under the law) while the Mexican government continues to subject its citizens to an old-world regime of

sexual control, particularly its darker-skinned, poorer, more indigenous populations. The corollary notion here is that the U.S. does not admit its own engagement in racializing or racially discriminating against (or even among) its citizen-subjects. For Luis in *Caballero*, the U.S. is the place for the liberated sexual subject, where a range of masculinities, including effeminacy, can exist. Luis seeks a kind of gay cultural asylum in the U.S. and achieves, or at least pursues, a queer American dream.

A recurring image in the novel is that of Don Santiago surveying his land and declaring to himself, "All this is mine." In fact, the phrase "All This is Mine" was González's original title for the manuscript. The final scene depicts the patriarch dying alone on a hill overlooking his ranch, his arms outstretched and empty. Does the irony of "all this is mine" go beyond the patriarch's demise and loss of all he believes is his? Given that the macho brother Alvaro is killed by Texas Rangers and the patriarch Don Santiago dies, leaving his ranch presumably to his daughters, who have both married U.S. Anglo army officers, Luis remains, despite his absence in the end, the sole remaining figure of the Mexican ranchero—the *caballero*. The titular claim of "All this is Mine" signals a final attempt by Jovita González to stake her literal claim to sole, or at least primary, authorship with her collaborator. "All this is Mine," as Don Santiago's legacy, may also be the sentiment of the emergent artistic anti-ranchero/anti-hero in the effeminately queer figure of Luis, who upon the death of the Mexican patriarch can finally imagine all of this—Mexico and America—to be his.

In the case of Jovita González's historical novel *Caballero*, I contend that the text attempts to resist not only U.S. hegemonic constructions of American history but also Mexican American patriarchal containment of the queer artist, as exemplified by the fictional character of Luis as well as the potentially queer artistic author González herself. Thus, through the character of the queer artist who resists patriarchal control of his gendered and racialized sexuality, González's novelistic commitment to queerness ultimately situates her work as a contribution not just to American literature and not just to a Chicana literary archive but to a decidedly *queer* Chicana literary archive.

Reading Jovita González's *Caballero* as an early queer Chicana novel demonstrates how the author's work prefigured the concerns of not just Chicana feminists in the late twentieth century but also specifically Chicana lesbian feminists. Just as other Chican@ studies projects have sought to bring González's work into conversation with later Chicana feminists, this project puts González into conversations with Chicana lesbian feminist writers such as Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa.

Significantly, a few of González's papers are located at the Nattie Lee Benson Latin American Collection at The University of Texas at Austin, where Anzaldúa's extensive archives have been placed by her literary foundation. Both writers were originally from Tejas and attended UT for their master's degrees. Both writers also experienced varying degrees of literary success and disappointment in their lifetimes and left unpublished works that would later be discovered by other scholars. Who would have thought,

however, that González's 1930s writing and Anzaldúa's 1980s work would share concerns around queer genders and sexualities?

The introduction to this project began with a reflection on Anzaldúa's death, her impact on queer Chican@ studies, and the Austin, Tejas tribute organized in her honor. Then we traversed across time and place through the post-borderlands with butch barbers returning to their barrios, old-school butches teaching baby butches how to join el movimiento, illegibly genderqueer Chican@s in California and Tejas, and transgendered Chican@s in Nueva York. Jovita González's queer *Caballero* brings us back to Tejas.

Tracking the non-normative queer subject across these Chicana texts certainly shows how genderqueerness inflects the experiences of Chican@s as racialized and ethnic subjects. By interrogating and reconfiguring accepted chronologies, I hope that this project productively counters the idea that Chicana lesbian and queer literature began in the late twentieth century, instead opting for a more complicated chronology that connects Jovita González across time and place to the current day performances of Adelina Anthony and the Butchlalis de Panochtitlán, as well as the contemporary fiction of Felicia Luna Lemus and Helena María Viramontes. Through these readings of queer Chicana literature and performance, we can productively situate genderqueerness as a significant presence in the post-borderlands.

Throughout this post-borderlands project, I have sought to honor Anzaldúa's ground-breaking work by pushing beyond it. If reading representations of Chican@ genderqueerness reveals where borderlands theory no longer fully serves, then I hope

that my post-borderlands approach of using gender and sexuality as multivalent and intersecting categories of analysis proves fruitful.

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Vita/Vida

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